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**A CONSERVATIVE LOOKS  
TO BARTH AND BRUNNER**

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# A CONSERVATIVE LOOKS TO BARTH AND BRUNNER

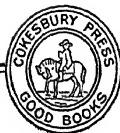
AN INTERPRETATION OF BARTHIAN THEOLOGY

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HOLMES ROLSTON.

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COKESBURY PRESS



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TO MY TEACHER,  
MY FATHER'S FRIEND AND MINE,  
*THE REV. THOMAS CAREY JOHNSON, D.D.*

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY  
UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, RICHMOND, VA.

It was through the fellowship erected as a memorial to him that I received the opportunity for study that made possible the writing of this book. The dedication of the book to him is expressive of my love and respect for him. It does not necessarily involve his indorsement of all the positions taken within its pages



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## P R E F A C E

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THE FIRST TIME I ever heard the name of Karl Barth was in the spring of 1928 when my friend, Rev. Felix Gear, who had been studying in the graduate school at Princeton, came to visit Union Seminary again. According to his report, one of the students at Princeton Seminary had become so absorbed in the study of a new German theologian, Karl Barth by name, that he had refused to waste time attending the classes taught by the Princeton professors. I never heard the outcome of the student's rebellion against the authority of the faculty, but I distinctly remember that at the time I wondered just what there could be in a modern theologian that could cause the student at Princeton to become so deeply absorbed in him.

My interest was deepened when the following year I had the pleasure of rooming during two terms of study in Edinburgh with a German student, Heinrich Jochums. Mr. Jochums was an ardent Barthian, and I learned from him the deep impression that Barth and his followers were making on the young men of Germany.

It was, therefore, with keen anticipation that I awaited the appearance in English of books that would interpret the

message of the Barthians to the English-speaking world. As the rapidly growing Barthian literature has come from the press, I have read it with increasing interest. As I have read, I have become convinced that God, by the medium of the Scripture and Spirit, is speaking to our generation through the new Swiss theologians. I have sought to humble myself, to be still, and to hear the Word that is being spoken through them.

And now the necessity is upon me to tell in my own words to my own people the meaning of the message I have received. As I seek to write in answer to this inner compulsion, I am painfully aware of the inadequacy of anything that I am able to say. The words I write are marked by the frailty and the error which is characteristic of all that is human. My only hope is that God in his grace will honor them for his purposes and make them the vehicle through which his Word is spoken to this generation.

HOLMES ROLSTON.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

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THE GERMAN PEOPLE have a singular ability seemingly to produce theological pioneers. In the Reformation Period it was Luther and Zwingli and Bucer who fructified Protestant thought. Later, it was Schleiermacher and Ritschl, who, with others, laid the foundation of modern Liberalism. Now out of German speaking Switzerland, there come new voices, those of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, to give a fresh stimulus and a new direction to theological thinking.

Since 1919, when Karl Barth, then pastor of the village of Safenwil, in Canton Aargau, published his famous Römerbrief, his influence has spread through Switzerland, through Germany, where he now teaches, and through Continental Protestantism, especially among pastors, who carry the real work of the Church, and among young men, on whom the future of the Church depends. From the Continent it has spread to England and Scotland, and is now reaching America. No voice in generations has so stirred Protestant thought. Everywhere there is criticism, and dissent, as well as approbation, but critics as disciples admit the services of the Barthian movement in bringing theology back to God. There is in Barth, to use his own early phrase,

“a pinch of cinnamon,” a corrective, that all theology seems to need.

Barth, aided by able collaborators, particularly Brunner, the systematizer of the movement, challenges the whole development of modern theology from Schleiermacher to the present time. It has been, they claim, a study of man rather than a study of God, anthropology rather than theology. They call for a return to the great doctrines of the Reformation, the great doctrines of God's Word. It is not, however, a return to what now passes as Reformation doctrine, as Bible doctrine. Traditional theology, they charge, has imprisoned God in its narrow formulas, even as Liberal theology has ignored him. Barth's challenge may be misdirected, his own theology, constantly growing, may be inadequate and faulty, but neither his challenge nor his contribution can be ignored. America may or may not furnish close disciples, but just as German theology, just as British theology, it will increasingly feel his influence. Conservatives will find in Barth and Brunner allies whose aid against a barren modernism is badly needed, keen critics at the same time, whose proffered aid must be carefully examined. Liberals will find in Barth a voice that may shake their edifice to its foundations or fill it with new power. Both conservatives and liberals need to look to Barth and Brunner—but how?

The German literature is increasing rapidly. The movement is still developing. For some time most of us will have to look through men who are able to interpret them to American audiences and relate them to American

thought. No one, I believe, has that ability better than the author of this book. He has entered into the thought of Barth and Brunner as few others, it seems to me, have done. He realizes what it means to theological thought and to the ordinary Christian in our own land. And he writes with such ease and such clarity that no one can fail to understand. In the pages of this book these two men, the most stimulating, the most important theological thinkers of our day, for the first time become really intelligible to average Americans.

ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON.





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# CHAPTER I

## THE IMPORTANCE OF KARL BARTH

---

"HISTORY HAS its surprises. For many years now different voices have been proclaiming that Protestantism is played out. Even so kindly a critic as Baron Von Hugel spoke of the intellectual emptiness of pure militant Protestantism. Suddenly there has burst upon us a true son of the Reformation. He is clothed in fire; his words, the echo of the Word which he has heard, are deep and challenging. They come with the sharp ring of prophetic assurance. To many of us they have before them a 'Thus saith the Lord.'"<sup>1</sup> With these words Professor J. A. Chapman opens his short introduction to *The Theology of Karl Barth*.

The amazing tributes which have been paid to Karl Barth by the men who have written concerning him are an indication of the way in which he is catching the attention of our generation. Thus McConnachie writes: "The appearance of Karl Barth in the Protestant Church at this solemn juncture of her history can only mean that he has been chosen and sent of God to do a work for his generation."<sup>2</sup> Again he describes the Barthian movement as "the greatest spiritual movement of the century."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See pages 212 ff. for footnote references.

Birch Hoyle says that the name of God on the lips of Barth "carries with it an awe and an impressive force, and as a New York reviewer has truly said, presents 'a challenge such as we have not listened to in this generation.' " <sup>4</sup>

Even those who are not quite certain of their attitude toward the New Theology are ready to admit its profound importance. Dr. Zerbe says: "People in the United States who have kept in touch with religious thought know that the celebrated Swiss theologian, Dr. Karl Barth, has hurled an enormous bomb into the theological camp and has caused a scatterment right and left. Theologians are not quite certain what has hit them, but they are agreed that it was something beyond the ordinary." <sup>5</sup> Dr. Pauck asserts: "Karl Barth is unquestionably the most discussed personality in the theological world today." <sup>6</sup> An editorial in the *Bulletin of the Federal Council of Churches* adds: "One is hardly considered well-informed today in Europe unless he can discuss Karl Barth." <sup>7</sup>

The Roman Catholics are becoming concerned over the rise of this new life in Protestantism. Dr. Karl Adam, a Catholic theologian, begins his article on Barth with the words: "There is no doubt that in the Protestant theology of Germany, which a few years ago appeared to the outside observer as a dry waste over which the hot wind of a limitless criticism played, wells have suddenly broken forth; a new sense for the supernatural realities, for God and his revelation, for faith and miracle, rises up and fights with uncommon force." <sup>8</sup>

The power of the Barthian movement is shown by the

amazing rapidity with which interest in his thought has spread to all parts of the Christian world. Dr. John MacKay, of the Board of Foreign Missions in the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., returns from a trip to South America to comment on its influence in Catholic countries of Latin America. In an address at the Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, he declares that it promises to be one of the most significant spiritual movements in South America. Mr. Francis P. Miller, Chairman of the World's Student Christian Federations, returns from a trip around the world and comments on the influence of Barth in Japan. He quotes the Rev. Darby Downes, of the Methodist Publishing House in Tokio, as saying the Barth's books translated into Japanese were outselling all other Christian books in Japan.

Count Keyserling has remarked that the new movement is saving Protestantism in Germany.<sup>9</sup> In writing of the effect of the Barthian theology Birch Hoyle says: "The theology of correction, as he [Barth] styled his teaching in 1922, has put its question mark upon nearly every dominant idea in theological circles, and the criticism of Barth comes from every side,"<sup>10</sup> Dr. Zerbe declares: "Barthianism is an all-inclusive world-view, probably the most original and comprehensive, certainly the most revolutionary of recent times."<sup>11</sup> "It is a theological upheaval in which scarcely one stone remains in its original place."<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Chapman gives his own reaction: "I confess to being half a Barthian . . . he is dealing with big themes, with the eternal splendors. After the sterility of fundamentalism and

the dullness and lifelessness of so much liberalism, one finds something that grips and compels, sets one asking those deep ultimate questions which, in Barth's suggestive phrase, are answers, and in the midst of much that is tumultuous and chaotic, and something that is wrong headed, the word breaks through—the Word which, in the phrase of the prophet so dear to Barth, is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.”<sup>13</sup>

The quotations that have been given serve at least to arouse the interest of the reader in the theology of Karl Barth. In dealing with Barth we are dealing with a star of the first magnitude. This would be admitted even by those who are violently opposed to his positions. Whatever a man's reaction to Barth may be, he cannot deny his importance for theology today. The movement has changed the theological situation on the continent. It bids fair to do the same thing for England and America. The man who wishes to understand the world of theology cannot afford, therefore, to be ignorant of Barth.

What is there in the Barthian theology which explains the way in which it has caught the interest of the world? The question cannot be fully answered until the message of the movement has been presented. But a few suggestions may be offered at this time. The Barthians have given the present position of modern theology the most severe criticism it has ever received. The prevailing theological thought of the day has been built on the foundations of the systems of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. Many modifications of these systems have been attempted, but the changes have been in

the periphery of their thought. The fundamental assumptions have not been seriously challenged. So widespread are these assumptions among writers in the field of theology that the editors of "The Library of Constructive Theology" could say of the men who were to write the various volumes: "The authors have a common mind not only with regard to the problem but also with regard to the starting point of reconstruction. They desire to lay stress on the value and validity of religious experience and to develop their theology on the basis of the religious consciousness. In so doing they claim to be in harmony with modern thought. The massive achievements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been built up on the method of observation and experiment, on experience, not on abstract reasoning. Our contention is that the moral and spiritual experience of mankind has the right to be considered and demands to be understood."<sup>14</sup> This statement quietly assumes that all theologians are agreed that reconstruction in theology must begin with the religious consciousness.

At the same time our age has witnessed an increasing discontent with the present condition of theology. In attempting to adapt her message to meet the needs of the modern world the Church seemed to have lost the vitality of her message. Theology had sought to find a firm basis for the superstructure of her system by building on the foundation of religious experience. But the foundation was not capable of bearing the weight that was put on it. Theology became subject to the relativism which was characteristic of the other fields of human endeavor. Theology lost her Absolute.

Along with this, there has come the realization of the chasm which exists between the position of theology today and historic Christianity. Brunner has summed up the situation: "To Ernst Troeltsch, who may perhaps be called the greatest and most modern of modernists, belongs the credit of having discerned and shown the irreconcilable contradiction which modern theology has so long attempted to hide. He saw and confessed boldly and without equivocation the chasm which separates modern theology from the theology of the Reformers and of the Ancient Church." "From 1700 A.D. to 1900 A.D. Christian theology changes its distinctively Christian bearings and drifts with an idealistic immanence-faith into theological liberalism. The year 1900 marks the approximate date when it began to sink into a sea of relativistic skepticism. If once man is made the measure of all things, no rational idea, however absolute it purports to be, can ward off the final dissolution of theology. To-day doubt assails not only Christianity; no, every world view is attacked, not merely the fundamentally Christian, ethical, and historical viewpoint; but all ethics, every norm, every absolute is endangered." <sup>15</sup>

The passage which has just been quoted brings out in characteristic fashion the real difference between the theology of the Reformation and the theology which is being taught in most of our seminaries today. It brings out also the Barthian criticism of the starting point of modern theology. Into a world which is dissatisfied with the prevailing uncertainty, the Barthians have come as men who feel

themselves moved of God to challenge many of the most fundamental presuppositions of modern theology.

This polemic against modernism would serve to arouse interest. Men have been drawn to Barthianism because they hoped to find through it deliverance from modernism. But no movement that seeks merely to destroy without attempting to build can continue very long. Men will put up with a great deal of destructive work if they feel that it is necessary to clear the ground for constructive work that is to follow. They soon weary of those who take delight in destruction, but have nothing to put in the place of that which they are tearing down. The Barthian movement began as a corrective, as "a marginal note." But it is not without its positive message. It destroys in order that it may build. It has been described as "an orthodox theology adjusted to the facts of modern science without accepting the relativism of modern liberalism."<sup>16</sup> The teachings of its leaders have been considered "a resurgence of the faith of the Reformation in a thoroughly modern form but in all its amazing power."<sup>17</sup>

Men have flocked to the classrooms of Barth and Brunner. They have been interested in the criticism of modernism, but they have come with the deeper hope of finding a theology through which the great message of historic Christianity could be brought to bear on the baffling problems of the thought life of today.

The Barthian movement roots in the past. Barth goes back to Luther and Calvin, especially the latter, as his masters. Certainly, a deep kinship exists between Barth and

Brunner and the leaders of the Reformation. Just how close this kinship is cannot be answered all at once. Elements are found in the thought of Barth that do not receive the same emphasis in the thought of the Reformation. In their attitude toward Scripture, in particular, there are many points of agreement, but also distinct divergences.

In general, however, the claim of the Barthians to have gone back to the Reformers can be sustained. The real strength of the movement lies in the way in which it roots in the past even as it differs from the past. In this respect they may be compared to the Reformers themselves. In the great debates of the sixteenth century the Roman theologians claimed that they were the true descendants of the apostolic church. It was part of the service of Luther and Calvin that through their knowledge of the Church fathers they were able to show the chasm which existed between the Roman Church of their century and the Church of the first three centuries. They were able also to show the harmony which existed between the thought of the greatest theologians of the early Church and the ideas for which the Reformation stood. The Barthians are attempting something of a similar feat. Their claim is that theology has gradually lost touch with the thought of the Reformation and that neither liberalism nor fundamentalism can be considered true descendants of Luther and Calvin. Along with this, they make the positive claim that the real implications of the Barthian message are in harmony with a true understanding of the Reformation thought. This claim needs careful attention. It cannot be adequately discussed until a more careful study



has been made of the Barthian position. We can say here that it is responsible for much of the interest in the Barthian message.

If Barth and Brunner had flamed forth with a message that was identical with the message of orthodoxy, they would not have caught the attention of the world. Their message would have been too familiar to be arresting. This is not to accuse them of playing expediency. The break with orthodoxy flows from deep conviction, not from expediency, but the fact remains that it is this break that has helped to give them the attention of the liberal world. The lure of the uncertain and the unknown has hovered over the Barthian leaders. Fundamentalists have come to them for deliverance from modernism. And liberal theologians have come to see if it were possible for an orthodox theology to be adjusted to the facts of modern science.

The figure of Karl Barth looms on the horizon of our religious life today like the figure of an Old Testament prophet. He is at the same time the most interesting, the most arresting, and the most disturbing figure in the world of theology. His message is a challenge to our generation, but it needs interpretation. Most of those who read his works that have been put into English go away without any certain knowledge as to just what he has said. Part of the difficulty arises from the difference between the thought background of America and that of Germany. But the Germans do not consider Barth easy reading. The writings of Immanuel Kant have never been considered light reading, but a German student once made the remark that he had

read both Kant and Barth and that he had found the former the easier to understand.<sup>17</sup> The remark was probably intended as an exaggeration, but even then it does not fail to bring out the difficulty of understanding some of Barth's works. Max Strauch writes in the same vein: "Whoever undertakes to read Barth discovers that he must split his head."<sup>18</sup>

The real difficulty in the Barthian thought arises from the nature of the subjects with which it deals. It is thus that Barth answers the charge that his theology is not simple. "Simple to us is neither Paul's Romans nor the present situation in theology, nor the present world-situation, nor man's situation in general toward God. . . . Hard and complicated is man's life today in every relation."<sup>19</sup> The difficulty is in the facts with which his thought seeks to deal. Life is not simple, and we do not really simplify our problem by presenting a system of thought that attains simplicity at the expense of ignoring half of the facts. No theology which faces the facts of life and meets them squarely can be called simple.

Brunner writes in a clearer style than Barth, but even here there is need for interpretation. The implications of his closely reasoned thought need to be more fully worked out against the background of the theological life of America.

If it is true that the new theology has put its question mark upon nearly every dominant idea in theological circles, then it is quite clear that its implications are too vast to be dealt with in any one thesis. Any man who writes in the field must be painfully aware of the things he has

not said. He knows that the best he can hope to do is to deal in a fragmentary way with a few of the more important aspects of the Barthian thought. He must be quite conscious of the inadequacy of the thing that he has done. When he has finished he will know that he has left unsaid far more than he has said.

There is, however, a real need for a presentation against the background of American thought of the leading ideas of the school. Such a presentation does not address its message to those who are already careful students of Barth, but to those who have heard of him but have no first-hand knowledge of him, and are, therefore, anxious to have someone give them the meaning of his message in a form that is not too difficult to be understood.

Such a study should be as simple as the nature of the subject will permit, but it should be remembered that difficult subjects must not be made simple at the sacrifice of the vigor of the thinking and the real truth of the positions held for the sake of a so-called *clarity*. The Barthian theology is too profound a system to be grasped without effort. Those who would enter into it must be willing to pay the price of mental endeavor. To those who are willing to pay the price that always goes with mental attainment, the Barthian school will give a message that will richly reward their labor. It will always be without meaning to those who are not willing to pay the price of serious study. All that can be striven for, therefore, is that the difficulties met by the reader shall flow from the intricacies of the problems

studied and not from the lack of clarity in the thought and expression of the writer.

In conservative circles, special demand is found for a study of the relation of the Barthian thought to the more orthodox position. To what extent are they in agreement? Wherein do they differ? Are the differences deep-seated and fundamental or are they on the surface? Can the two be harmonized or must a man ultimately choose between them? These and similar questions are being constantly asked. It is important that a thesis which is written from a conservative background should deal with them.

Along the lines just outlined, we shall seek to carry through a study of the theology of Barth and his school. The work is put forward in the hope that it will be found helpful and that it will serve as an introduction to more serious study.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF THE BARTHIAN THOUGHT

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IN THE ATTEMPT to grasp the thought of another the first essential is to come to an understanding of the underlying principles which determine that which is distinctive in his thought. When we have apprehended the meaning of the principles upon which the work is built, we are able to relate the details to the springs from which they inevitably flow. The assumptions with which a writer starts will determine the conclusions that he reaches. This is particularly true in the study of Barth. His thought is difficult at best. It can never be understood until it is related to the assumptions from which it starts.

We must be on our guard, however, against the attempt to make of the Barthian movement a closed system. Barth describes his theology as essentially a movement, and apart from the movement it cannot be fully understood. The attempt to give adequate statement to his thought he likens to the attempt to draw the picture of a flying bird. The result at best can only show the bird in one position. It cannot give the bird in its flight. The Barthian theology is too young to have run into fixed and clearly defined forms. The Barth of today is not identical with the Barth who published the first edition of the commentary on Romans. He

has changed his positions in many things. He is probably destined to revise his positions many times before his final work is done. Part of the interest in the study of Barth comes from the realization that the men who drink from him are drinking from a flowing stream.

But while it is quite true that Barthianism is a movement rather than a position, it is equally true that the main outlines of its thought are quite clear. The changes that are yet to come will be a matter of emphasis and correction. They will scarcely call in question the assumptions from which the thought of Barth starts. It is to these assumptions that we give our attention now.

#### THE WORLD OF TIME AND THE WORLD OF ETERNITY

Barth himself gives what he considers the key to the understanding of his system. "If I have a system, it is the qualitative difference between time and eternity, which in the negative and positive sense is ever kept in mind."<sup>1</sup> Concerning this statement Dr. Zerbe adds: "In the hands of Barth and Barthians, this conception becomes at one tremendous sweep a teleology, ontology, cosmology, theodicy, and theology."<sup>2</sup> In 1922 Barth denied that he had any desire to create a "new theology" that would come into rivalry with the existing types of theology. He did not start out to create a system that would stand in comparison with those of the fundamentalists, of the Ritschlians, or the liberals. His theology was to be more of a sort of corrective to all theology. It was to be merely a marginal note. But he expanded that marginal note into a five-hundred-page com-

mentary on the Epistle to the Romans, and it looks very much as if he is also in process of expanding it into a theology. Our purpose here is to examine the point of view from which he starts.

Barth believes in the existence of another world, the world of God that stands in utter contradiction to the world of man. He is sure that we must start from the belief in the existence of this world of God, and that only as we start with this assumption are we able to come to an understanding of the world of man. To use his own words: "God is in heaven, man on earth. The relation of God to man, or man to God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the sum of philosophy. Philosophers regard human wisdom. The Bible regards Jesus Christ as the fons et origo." "In interpreting Romans, I assume that Paul was conscious of such relationship and that I am merely stating it. . . . Whether my assumption is justified will appear from my interpretation of the epistle as a whole and of its several parts. If my assumption be false, if Paul really spoke of something else than the permanent crisis of time and eternity, I should be led by the text to an absurdity. If one were to ask, finally, why I start with just this postulate, I should answer God is God. Although not claiming to have explained everything satisfactorily, I have found no reason to recede from my starting point. 'Paul knew something about God that we do not know. That I know Paul knew this is my system, my dogmatic presupposition, my 'Alexandrianism,' or however one may designate it.'"<sup>3</sup>

The Barthian theology is based on the assumption that

there is a difference between time and eternity, and that the difference is not quantitative but qualitative. There is a This-side and a Yon-side, but the Yon-side is the real side. The two are incommensurable. God is God and man is man. You cannot speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice. The world in which man lives now is distinct from the world of God. Between the two there is a chasm vast and deep.

The application of this assumption to the problems of theology must be given later. But a correct understanding of the meaning of this fundamental assumption is so essential for a comprehension of the Barthian thought that we need to consider the assumption very thoroughly. It is just here that we begin to meet with difficulty. The world of eternity exists in such utter contradiction to the world of time that our earthbound imaginations do not possess the necessary categories for a proper description of it. If the world of eternity is qualitatively distinct from the world of time, it follows that it is impossible for a positive disclosure of it to be made to earthbound eyes. The man who has been blind from his birth does not understand, and does not have the capacity to understand a lecture on the blending of various shades of color. The man who has no ear for music does not have the capacity for understanding the world of grand opera. He is conscious that such a world exists. At times there may be movements in his being that are possible only because the great world of music does exist. He may be conscious of an emptiness in his life. He may even cherish the hope that some day there may be given to him



the capacity to enter into the mighty harmonies of the world of music. But as long as he is tone deaf he can never know the meaning of music at its best. It is in a relation somewhat similar to this that man finds himself when he stands in the world of time and tries to think of the world of eternity.

We find in the last analysis that we can describe the way in which the world of eternity differs from the world of time only in the negation of negations. Consider for example the famous Shorter Catechism definition of God: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." In this answer the attributes are usually divided into communicable and incommunicable. The first three belong to the latter class and represent the attempt of man to describe the attitudes in which God is qualitatively distinct from man. Every one of them is the negation of a negation. "Infinite" is the negation of man's finitude. "Eternal" is the negation of man's bondage to the temporal. "Unchangeable" is the negation of man's capacity to change and decay. In dealing with these attributes we cannot say what God is. We can only say what he is not. There is something here that escapes us. We are aware of its existence. We can describe it only in negatives.

The closest thing that we have to a positive disclosure of the nature of the life of the world of eternity is found in the resurrection life of Christ. To give a study of this now is to anticipate at the beginning what must be dealt with in greater fulness in its rightful place in the presentation of

the Barthian thought. The justification for touching on it here lies in the great importance of a correct understanding of the Barthian thought of the two worlds and in the fact that this thought receives its most adequate illustration in the study of the resurrection.

In the risen Christ a form of life touched this world which was quite different from anything that the world had ever seen. All other stories of a resurrection are merely a calling back of a departed spirit to the lifeless clay that for a few more years a life may be continued that is not essentially different from the life that has already been lived. No new form of life appears. Death has not been transcended. It has merely been postponed. But in the resurrection of Christ a new form of life appears. In him God begins the disclosure of a form of life that is utterly different from anything that men have seen before. The Barthian thought is that in the resurrection of Christ we have a revelation of the world of eternity in the world of time. There is a downward movement at this point. The tangent touches the circle. The existence of that form of life that shall ultimately be given to the children of God is declared to men by the power of the resurrection. But even here man is so bound to his finitude that he cannot apprehend the positive content of this form of life. Even in the description of the resurrection life of Christ man must move in negatives. The risen Christ is clearly independent of space. He appears behind closed doors. He vanishes at will. He is independent of time. Seemingly his presence can be both on the road to Emmaus and with Peter, the leader of the

apostles. He is not spirit apart from body. The disciples touch him. He eats before them. The existence of a real body is just as certain as it is that it is impossible for us to describe the nature of that body.

Even Paul in his matchless description of the risen life in the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians finds that he cannot break the bonds of his creaturehood. He can describe this life only in the negation of negations. We quote the heart of his great passage: "All flesh is not the same flesh; but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body. . . . As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." <sup>4</sup> The passage we have just quoted flows with such inspired eloquence that an analysis of it seems a sacrilege, but for the illustration of the thought we are considering it must be attempted. We find on analysis that even in the midst of the glowing eloquence of the passage nothing positive has been said. We are told that the flesh of the celestial body differs from the flesh of the terrestrial body. We are not told just wherein it differs. All that

has really been said is that it is not terrestrial. The same thought runs through the passage. Incorruption is the negation of corruption. Glory is the negation of dishonor. Power is the negation of weakness. Immortality is the negation of mortality.

It is true that in the thirteenth chapter Paul does make something of a positive disclosure of the nature of that other life. "Love never faileth." . . . "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three." The contradiction between the two orders of life does not prevent certain spiritual characteristics from passing through the *crisis* and emerging on the other side. Even there, love, the giving of life in communion, abides. Faith as dependence on God continues to be the source of life. Hope abides and carries with it the assurance of a life that is not static.

But this insight does not resolve the contradiction that exists between the two orders. God is in heaven. Man is on earth. Between the two worlds there is an infinite qualitative difference. The Barthian thought in its essence flows from the recognition of this difference. There is a This-side and a Yon-side, but the Yon-side is the real side, and life on "This-side" can be understood only on the basis of its relation to the Yon-side. From this point of view, the Barthian criticism of modern thought is just that it has forgotten the existence of a Yon-side and has sought to explain the world of time without considering its relation to that of eternity. The assumption that such a world as that revealed in the resurrection life of Christ does exist is basic to the Christian faith. And certainly if such a world does exist, life here

cannot be fully understood without the consideration of its relation to the other life which is its source. Life here cannot be complete in itself.

Before proceeding further, we need to guard against a common misunderstanding. In a certain sense, the disclosure of the nature of that "other life" is a thing that lies in the future and in the Barthian thought is connected with the Second Coming of Christ. But we completely misunderstand the Barthian thought if we throw the whole thing into the future and make of it something that is temporal. Eternity does not begin when time ends. The two worlds exist simultaneously. In the thought of John, for example, eternal life is for the Christian both a present possession and a future realization. The Christian life is "hid with Christ in God." It exists in the present. The opening of its nature lies in the future. The New Testament looks for a consummation of the age in which the present age shall be done away and the higher life shall be revealed. But the New Testament never forgets that the other age already exists simultaneously with this age and that there are movements from the higher to the lower which affect the life of the lower. The realization of this accounts for the "upward look" that Barth finds in Paul.

In the Barthian thought, it is the existence of the Yon-side that explains the presence of contradictions in life on the This-side. In all higher truth there is an element that escapes expression. There are contradictions in life here that will never be solved until we look with eyes that have been opened to see the life of the other world that escapes us

here. A helpful illustration can be found from the world of the movies. When a play is put on a stage, the action takes place in three dimensions. The actors move in a world that has length, and breadth, and depth. In the talkie, the action takes place on a canvas that has length, and breadth, but not depth. It moves in two dimensions. It assumes the appearance of reality because the human eye sees in two dimensions. But in the talkie things happen that seem to be a contradiction. The figures of two men appear from opposite sides of the screen and move to the center. In life two men cannot meet and pass on the same plane, but in the talkie the figures moving on the same plane meet and pass. Neither is injured. The seemingly impossible has happened. Of course, we know that the reason it could happen is that the action of the talkie was filmed from a play that moved in three dimensions. A dimension that was present in the play is left out in the talkie, and the absence of this dimension accounts for the contradiction. To the figures moving in two dimensions, it would be inexplicable. To one who was in a position to see the dimension that was left out the solution would constitute no difficulty.

Thus in the Barthian thought the world of time has a relation to the world of eternity that in some respects is similar to the relation of the world of two dimensions to the world of three dimensions. The existence of the world of three dimensions accounts for the contradictions in the world of two dimensions. The absence of the third dimension is the real cause of the inability of those who are mov-

ing in two dimensions to account for the seeming contradictions. The existence of the world of eternity accounts for the existence of contradictions in the world of time. The absence of our knowledge of the nature of the world of eternity is the real cause of our inability to solve the seeming contradictions. The disclosure of the contradictions that arise in the world of two dimensions must be made in the world of three dimensions. The disclosure of the contradictions that arise in the world of time must be made in the world of eternity.

Against the background of the Barthian thought of the two worlds, we must deal with the difficult Barthian paradox. We quote first a passage from Barth that shows the way in which he uses the paradox in a seemingly very confusing manner: "God, the pure limit and the pure beginning of all that we are, have, and do, in finite qualitative distinction confronting man and all that is human . . . . God, the absolute Halt! over against all human disquiet, and the absolute Forward! over against all human repose, the Yea in our Nay and the Nay in our Yea, the First and the Last and as such the Unknown, but never at all one magnitude among others in the *milieu* known to us . . . . this is the Living God. And this is the Evangel, the message of salvation of Jesus Christ. This Hidden God, the Living One, reveals himself as such that the Impossible as such shines out over the visibly infinite realm of the possible." <sup>5</sup>

The passage quoted is an attempt of Barth to describe the transcendence of God. The whole passage bristles with paradoxes. He seems to affirm and deny the same thing in

the same sentence. What is the source of the Barthian paradox? The real source of it lies in the nature of the thing he is trying to describe. He is trying to describe that which cannot be adequately caught in human categories.

The paradox is familiar to the New Testament. Christ often expresses spiritual truth in the form of the paradox. "Love your enemies." "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it." Here the paradox turns on a higher and a lower life. The man is called upon to surrender the lower that he may find the higher. The paradox is more seeming than real.

Paul is rich in paradoxes. He calls the Ephesians "to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge."<sup>6</sup> He tells the Corinthians that "God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most striking illustration of the use of the paradox in Paul is found in the sixth chapter of Second Corinthians. We quote a portion of the passage: "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God . . . by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Literature is filled with the paradox. Consider for example the description Tennyson gives of Lancelot's guilty love for the Queen:

"His honor rooted in dishonor stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."<sup>8</sup>

In its usual use the paradox presents that which is against



appearance but is not against reality. It brings out truth by expressing it in seemingly contradictory statements that force men to go beneath appearance to reality to solve the contradiction. In this sense it is used by the Barthian writers. But in their thought it often goes deeper than a mere appearance of contradiction that can be resolved by going beneath the surface from appearance to reality. Often it is used by the Barthians to express a contradiction that cannot be resolved because the solution of it lies in that "other world" which is responsible for its existence. In this sense it does not express the self-contradictory, but it does express that which is at present incapable of solution.

The study of the paradox brings us to the study of that which is closely connected with it, the Barthian use of the dialectic approach. The dialectic method is familiar to the German mind, but has not been used with any great frequency in American textbooks on theology. As used by the Barthians it means that the higher spiritual truth can be best approached by seemingly contradictory statements. Both the affirmation and the denial contain an element of truth. The ultimate truth lies somewhere between the two and cannot be perfectly caught and expressed in human categories. The necessity of the dialectic arises from the existence of that other world which man is not qualified to fully lay hold of. In the highest realms of truth man must approach it brokenly. The Incarnation may be approached by the dialectic method. Consider the statement, "God was manifest in the flesh."<sup>9</sup> Compare it with the line of the old hymn, "Veiled in flesh the godhead see." One sentence as-

serts that God was manifest in the flesh. The other asserts that God was veiled in the flesh. Both contain elements of truth. Each sentence needs the other to balance it to prevent a misapprehension.

A common example of dialectic thinking is found in the advice usually given to ministers as they leave the Seminary: "Pray as if all depended on God. Work as if it all depended on you." The contradiction between the two statements is self-evident. And yet every preacher knows that he must guide his ministry by these seemingly contradictory statements. He knows that both statements are attempts to lay hold of truth. He knows, too, that each statement needs the other to balance it. The contradiction between the two cannot be resolved, but neither the thesis nor the antithesis can be surrendered. He must hold to both or his ministry will be impoverished.

In similar manner we can say that the Bible is the Word of God. But the thesis must be met by the antithesis in which we say that the Bible is the word of man. The contradiction lies in the fact that God is not man and therefore man's word cannot be identified with God's word. Of course, we can try to build bridges between these two statements, but perhaps in the long run we will come closest to the truth by the frank admission that there is an element there that escapes us, an element we cannot adequately express. We may find that the best we can do is to try to lay hold of this truth by seemingly contradictory assertions.

An example of dialectic thinking is found in Gandhi's confession of faith. "He [God] is the greatest democrat the

world knows for he leaves us 'unfettered' to make our choice between evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known for he often dashes the cup from our lips and under the cover of free will leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for himself at our expense." Andrews comments: "In these last sentences it must be understood that Mahatma Gandhi is speaking in the poetical language of paradox, seeking in dim imagery to portray the unimaginable." <sup>10</sup>

We may not agree with Gandhi's statements, but we must see in them a soul that by seemingly contradictory statements is trying to lay hold of a truth, the center of which escapes him. This is a true definition of the Barthian paradox. With these illustrations in mind, we are ready to consider Barth's own description of his method. "The third way is the way of *dialectic*. It is the way of Paul and the Reformers, and intrinsically it is by far the best. The great truths of dogmatism and self-criticism are presupposed by it, but also it is their fragmentariness, their merely relative nature. This way undertakes seriously and positively to develop the idea of God on the one hand and the criticism of man and all things human on the other; but they are not now considered independently, but are both referred constantly to their common presupposition, to the living truth which, to be sure, may not be named, but lies between them and gives to both their meaning and interpretation. Here there is an unwavering insight into the fact that the living truth, the determining content of any real utterance

concerning God, is that God [but really God!] becomes man [but really man!].

"But how now shall the necessary dependence of both sides of the truth upon this living Center be established? The genuine dialectician *knows that this Center cannot be apprehended or beheld* [italics mine], and he will not if he can help it allow himself to be drawn into giving direct information about it, knowing that all such information, whether it be positive or negative, is not really information, but always either dogma or self-criticism. On this narrow ledge of rock one can only walk: if he attempts to stand still, he will fall either to the right or to the left, but fall he must. There remains only to keep walking—an appalling performance for those who are not free from dizziness—*looking from one side to the other*, from positive to negative and from negative to positive." <sup>11</sup>

In the next paragraph he gives an illustration of this performance. "Our task is to interpret the Yes by the No and the No by the Yes without delaying more than a moment in either a fixed Yes or a fixed No; to speak of the glory of God in creation, for example, only to pass to emphasize God's complete concealment from us in that creation (as in Romans 8); to speak of death and the transitory quality of this life only to remember the majesty of the wholly other life which meets us at the moment of death; of the creation of man in the image of God simply and solely to give warning once and for all that man as we know him is a fallen man, whose misery we know better than his glory;

and, on the other hand, to speak of sin only to point out that we should not know it were it not forgiven us.”<sup>12</sup>

To those who object to his method Barth replies: “My friend, you must understand that if you ask about God and if I am really to tell you about *him*, dialectic is all that can be expected from *me*. I have done what I could to make you see that neither my affirmation nor my denial lays claim to being God’s truth. Neither one is more than a witness to that truth, which stands in the center between every Yes and No. And therefore I have never affirmed without denying and never denied without affirming, for neither affirmation nor denial can be final. If my *witness* to the final answer you are seeking does not satisfy you, I am sorry.”<sup>13</sup>

McConnachie comments on the dialectic method: “We are not to think of the Yes and the No balanced over against each other in a condition of equilibrium, each, as it were, in its own right. The Yes is always primary. But the truth lies ultimately neither in the Yes nor in the No, but in the beyond where both Yes and No take their rise. The synthesis is with God, who alone can speak the undialectic word, the Amen, beyond which there is no going.”<sup>14</sup>

The quotation just given brings out the distinction between the Barthian dialectic and the Hegelian dialectic. The Hegelian method lay in the statement of the thesis and the antithesis. This was followed by the synthesis in which an attempt was made to combine in one statement the elements of truth found both in the thesis and in the antithesis. Barth does not draw the synthesis. The synthesis lies in

the realm of truth to which man in this life cannot enter. The synthesis is with God.

We must be careful to remember that the Barthian dialectic does not flow from unbelief. It is not an assertion of a world in which there is no Absolute, of a world in which even contradictions may be true. The dialectic flows in the last analysis from the conception of the two worlds and the realization of the "otherness of the world of eternity."

Brunner gives clear expression to this truth: "That which is the characteristic of all evangelical utterances of faith, the dialectic, the Yes in the No and the No in the Yes that is so hard for us to understand in thought—ah! still more so in life—the refraction of the sinning world on the divine light of truth, is also the augury of the eschatological. Therefore, Christian faith points beyond itself to the End, to the resurrection of the flesh, because in itself it is a contradiction. . . . The dialectical-contradictory asks for a dissolution: but such a dissolution of which no man, not even in thought, is master. The dialectic of faith, in distinction from the dialectical philosophy, remains unsolved. Its remaining is the same as the waiting for the redemption which God alone can give. Not as though this hope attains to faith: faith is nothing else but the assurance of the coming. As such it is power and joy, as such it is present possession. But *only* as such." <sup>15</sup>

The way of the dialectic is opposed to the way of dogma in that, according to Barth, men seek by the way of dogma to give too positive a statement of what they know concerning God. Barth recognizes the right of dogma and at times

the necessity of it.<sup>16</sup> His real criticism of it is that it has too often forgotten the nature of the greatest spiritual truth. It has failed to be humble and to realize that there were things it could not say. Thus the Barthian criticism of dogma flows from the fundamental assumption of the Barthian school, the existence of two worlds that stand in infinite qualitative distinction to each other.

### THE DIVINE INITIATIVE

The Barthian idea of the two worlds lies at the heart of all their thought. A second principle may be put alongside of it, which is really little more than a development of the first assumption. Barth's position is that the starting point of theology is not man but God. A few quotations will illustrate this position. "The knowledge of God is not a possibility which we may, or at the worst may not, apply in our search for a meaning of the world; it is rather the presupposition on the basis of which consciously, half consciously, or unconsciously all our searchings for meaning are made."<sup>17</sup> He asserts that modern theology makes man the certainty and God the problem and that this is fundamentally wrong.<sup>18</sup> "We set this demand: Theology must turn in a primitive way from fear to courage and acknowledge its true meaning by its act; to understand the self-certainty of man from the certainty of God and not vice versa, the logos in us from the logos of God and not the reverse."<sup>19</sup>

The real reason for the Barthian approach lies in the nature of their thought of the other world. If it be true

that the gap between God and man is that between utter incommensurables, then it will inevitably follow that man cannot rise from himself to God. If the distinction between the two is an infinite qualitative distinction, then all that man can know of God must come from God's disclosure of himself.

Birch Hoyle comments: "It is the mark of this kind of theology, in contrast to the usual method of procedure followed for almost a century now, to start from above, from the God-side, and work down to man. Barth's line of approach is exactly that of a Scots thinker, 'Rabbi' Duncan, as given in his talks with Dr. W. Knight in *Colloquia Peripatetica*: 'The tendency of all my thinking is not to look upward from man to God, but downward from God to man.' Knight's rejoinder: 'But as we are not divine, how do you get up in the first instance?' was met with the remark, 'I cannot tell you; *only I am up* . . . . I must start from theology.'" <sup>20</sup>

The importance of the Barthian approach here lies in the way in which it challenges the whole of the modern method of procedure in theology. Since the days of Schleiermacher, liberal theology has assumed that man was the certainty and that God was the question, and that the method of approach was to proceed from man, the known, to God, the unknown. It has taught that we gained our knowledge of God by a study of the highest and best that we know in man. But on Barthian principles this method of approach is impossible. In their thought it gives at best a God who is the creation of the mind of man and such a



God is not really God. We cannot lay hold of God in our own strength. We must wait quietly and humbly. Our knowledge of God must come from our hearing God's disclosure of himself.

As this principle comes out again and again in the Barthian thought, we will not attempt to deal with it fully here. We must deal with it as we study their thought of the transcendence of God and their thought of the nature of revelation. It is appropriate, however, to pause here for a moment to consider the far-reaching effect of this principle. It controls their thought of Scripture. Modernism thinks of Scripture as a record of man's experiences with God. The Barthians think of it as the witness to God's revelation of himself. It controls the thought of the Person of Christ. Modernism thinks of an apostheosis of man. The Barthians think of an Incarnation of God. The movement is downward, not upward. The Barthian premise that theology starts from God furnishes a point of view that in the end affects practically every doctrine of the Christian faith.

### THE SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

The third of the organizing principles which underlie the Barthian thought may be described as the spiritual perception. It stands in close relation to the other two. The basic assumption is the existence of two worlds that stand in infinite qualitative distinction to each other. From this, it follows that man's knowledge in spiritual things must come from a downward movement in which God reveals himself. The next question must, of course, deal with man's reception

of that revelation. How can man receive the revelation which God makes of himself? The answer is given in a paragraph from the call of the Student Christian Movement that is truly Barthian in its thought: "God is known in the traffic of life. One can only come to know him by faith and obedience. It is in the very act of faith and obedience that his reality becomes evident. Only those who abandon the attitude of the mere spectator and commit their lives to him meet with the spiritual realities of his kingdom."<sup>21</sup>

The same thought is constantly found in the writings of Paul. In fact, it is the theme of the first two chapters of First Corinthians. In these chapters he is studying the great problem that has come through the results of his ministry. The message of the cross means everything to him and to those who are Christians. At the same time, he is forced to realize that it has no meaning outside of the group who are followers of Jesus. It is a piece of superb foolishness to the Greeks. It constitutes the great stumblingblock to the Jews. To Paul it has meant wisdom and power. It has meant the answer to the two deepest needs of human life, the need for knowledge and the need for power for righteous living. The great problem with which he wrestles is how it can be possible for the message of the cross to mean so much to some people and absolutely nothing to other people. He states the problem in sharp paradoxes: "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God." . . . "Seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of

preaching to save them that believe. Seeing that the Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”<sup>22</sup> Paul wrestles with the great problem and at last reaches a solution of it that is satisfactory to him. He comes to the conclusion that the things of God can be known only as they are revealed by the Spirit to those who have yielded their lives to God. Knowledge in these things comes as the Spirit speaks through faith to the heart of the believer. “But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . We have received the Spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. . . . Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them because they are spiritually judged.”<sup>22</sup> The principle which Paul sets forth is in perfect harmony with the Barthian thought.

The same thought is found in the teachings of Jesus. “Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”<sup>23</sup> The first part of the sentence makes an amazing claim. Jesus says that he is the light of the world. Light in this passage stands for knowledge. Jesus, therefore, makes the claim that he is the source of the world’s knowledge. In him there is a revelation of the knowledge that man desperately needs. The

second part of the sentence gives the conditions for the receiving of that knowledge: "*He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" It is only through the act of faith, in which man surrenders himself to Christ, that man receives the light which breaks through Christ. The knowledge is not given to the spectator who wishes to stand off and judge the whole matter with no commitment of life. It is not given to the detached observer. Only through surrender can man enter into the knowledge of the truth which Christ brings. The same idea runs through another passage: "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."<sup>24</sup> The promise of finding the truth is based on the condition of abiding in his word. There is a spiritual condition which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of spiritual truth.

The Barthians make the New Testament thought of the spiritual perception central to all their teaching. Brunner writes: "There is a third way of seeking truth; when one no longer speaks with philistine concern for practical values; when it is not sought with cool scientific objectivity or with a serene aesthetic outlook upon the world, but with the passion of a drowning man who passionately cries for help. It is the quest of the man who passionately feels the import of the question, 'What is truth? I must know or I shall die?' That is the real search for truth."<sup>25</sup> "The urgency and decisiveness of this question are inseparable from its object; they are correlative to it, so that you may say, 'If you do not so seek, namely, personally and passionately, you

do not seek at all.' Your heart will be aflame with the question only when you are dealing with the fiery center, and not the circumference, of existence. Here is an unalterable co-ordination: to find the center of existence, the center of your being has to be active; with the periphery of your being you can find only the surface of reality."<sup>26</sup>

He states the same thing from another point of view: "But let me assure you that an outsider's question can never be answered unless he ceases to be an outsider. If God speaks to me, I can only hear him by letting him speak to me. The majority of the most difficult questions with which Christian theology must deal arise from an attempt to comprehend and appreciate its message from the standpoint of the spectator. But it can be demonstrated a priori that from this point of view the Christian message will sound foolish and absurd from the very start. Its absurdity, however, is not to be sought in the message itself; but rather in the fact that a word which ought to be heard and appreciated as a challenge to us is accepted theoretically; that is, from the spectator's standpoint."<sup>26</sup>

The general principle is applied to the ability to see that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. "The real Christ is not visible to the historian's eye. To see the revelation of God in Christ is a gracious privilege of faith, of the believer and not of the historian; or metaphysically speaking, the organ with which Christ is apprehended is not the historian's scientific eye but the spiritual eye of the believer."<sup>27</sup>

McConnachie gives a quotation from one of Barth's sermons in which Barth shows Jesus as he brings Nicodemus

from the detached position of a spectator to that of a man who must lay hold of truth through an act of decision. "When Nicodemus comes to Jesus the shrewd old counselor has no other intention than a cautious, tolerant, religious talk from bank to bank of a stream, as it were. 'Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher.' 'You are a man who interests me. I should like to hear what you have got to say.' The spectator! Must not Jesus be glad when one of the 'masters in Israel' comes thus far? 'Verily, except a man be born again,' says Jesus, in his very first word. And Nicodemus finds himself face to face with something incomprehensible, something he cannot fathom. There is then to be no measured talk from bank to bank, where each will maintain his own view. He discovers himself suddenly in the middle of the stream, struggling as for dear life like a drowning man. The ground has gone completely from under his feet. He stutters: 'How can these things be?'"<sup>28</sup>

Barth and Brunner have called men from the mockery of trying to enter into the truth of God from the standpoint of the spectator. God opens his truth to those who surrender to him.

The world of eternity exists in infinite qualitative distinction from the world of time. The truth of God is given through God's revelation of himself. It is heard by those who receive it in the act of faith in which they surrender to it. These are the three principles that underlie the whole of the Barthian thought.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE TRANSCENDENT GOD

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“WHEREVER YOU LOOK at the underlying presupposition of men’s thinking about God today you find, not the old dualism against which the ancient church had so long and fierce a conflict, *but a gladly recognized affinity between God and man*. In our theology no longer are the divine and human like oil and water that cannot mix; rather, *all that is best in us is God in us*. This makes faith in the divine Christ infinitely easier than it was under the old régime. One takes up the Westminster Confession and reads a passage like this about Christ: ‘Two whole perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.’<sup>1</sup> . . . . (It) is utterly unreal to our thinking . . . . because the background of the abysmal distance between the divine and the human which the Confession had perforce to bridge is no longer in our minds. The presupposition of all our thinking is the conviction, not that there is a vast distance between God and man, but that God and man belong together *and in each other are fulfilled*.” The passage just given is a quotation from Dr. Fosdick. It is probably true that in it he is a spokesman for much of modern thinking.

Alongside of this passage we place an extract from Barth's Commentary on Romans: "God, the pure limit and the pure beginning of all that we are, have, and do, standing over in infinite qualitative difference to man and all that is human, nowhere and never identical with that which we call God, experience, surmise, and pray to as God, the unconditioned Halt as opposed to all human rest, the Yes in our No and the No in our Yes, the First and the Last, and as such Unknown, but nowhere and never a magnitude amongst others in the medium known to us, God the Lord, the Creator and Redeemer . . . . that is the Living God." <sup>3</sup>

Another passage from Fosdick brings out even more clearly the real point which is at issue: "As Emerson said, 'A drop of water has the properties of the sea, but cannot exhibit a storm.' *So we reveal God* without the deeps and tides and currents which Jesus knew, without the relations to the world's life which his influence has sustained. He is unique.

'No mortal can with him compare,  
Among the sons of men.'

Yet the God who was in Jesus is the same God who is in us. You cannot have one God and two kinds of divinity. While like drops of water we are very small beside his sea, yet it was one of the supreme days in man's spiritual history when the New Testament started men singing that they were children of God." <sup>4</sup>

Dr. Fosdick's mastery of expression does not conceal the fact that in the passage which has just been quoted the qualitative distinction between God and man has been ob-



literated. He is perfectly willing to grant a quantitative distinction. Man is a drop of water and God has the vastness of the sea. But there are no two kinds of sea water and there are no two kinds of divine life. Jesus differs from man in degree, but not in kind. Jesus gives a more perfect revelation of God, *but we reveal God*. The divine and the human are not like oil and water. A complete fusion of the two is possible. *The best in us is God in us*.

Dr. Chapman sums up some of the modern tendencies against which Barth is contending in his doctrine of God: "By the modern spirit is meant among other things, emphasis on the immanence of God, a minimizing of what separates man from God, a tendency to monism, the acceptance of evolution without any clear perception that evolution has become the problem, a cheerful belief in progress, the stress laid on time to the exclusion of eternity, the partial loss of the note of righteousness, light and Pelagian views of sin, and following on these last two easy doctrines of atonement which make old theories sound strange in our ears." <sup>5</sup>

The Barthian criticism of these elements in the modern thought of God flows from the Barthian assumption of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. In their emphasis on the transcendence of God, the Barthians assert that God does not reveal himself through nature. Brunner defines their position: "When here and in the following lectures we distinguish between the 'transcendent' God of the Bible and the God-idea of the 'religion of immanence,' it is important to note that we are treating of an epistemological but not a cosmological transcendence. We

hold, i.e., that God cannot be known by his active presence in the world. His presence in nature and history is not denied, but is regarded as hidden, so that what God is is not revealed.”<sup>6</sup>

In his second book he gives fuller statement to this thought: “Much nonsense has been talked about the ‘Barthian Theology’ having perception only for the transcendence of God, not for his immanence. As if we too were not aware that God the Creator upholds all things by his power, that he has set the stamp of his divinity on the World and created man to be in his own image. It is just because these things are so, and only for that reason, that real contradiction is possible. Only the man created as the image of God can be a sinner, a contradictor; only the man to whom God as Creator is ever near can be further off from God than any star from earth; only the man in whose reason there is a divinely-caused unrest can so err in his reason as to be no longer capable of recognizing God in his own creation, but only where God manifests himself to him in the lowliness of the Son of Man. All that our critics have written about ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’ really does not touch us.”<sup>7</sup>

Barth shows that he shares the same general position in a sentence that is thrown off in the midst of the discussion of another problem. “Even the *regnum naturae* is the kingdom of God with the addition of—and in spite of—the veil which now covers its glory.”<sup>8</sup>

The Barthian position is similar to that taken by Athanasius. The Platonists had asserted that “there are two

main paths by which man can arrive at the knowledge of God, the book of the Universe and the contemplation or self-knowledge of the soul itself.”<sup>9</sup> Athanasius would agree with them that man in his unfallen state could arrive at a knowledge of God by these paths. He differed from them in emphasizing the insufficiency of these proofs after sin has clouded the soul’s vision, and, above all, “in insisting on the divine Incarnation as the sole remedy for this inability, as the sole means by which *man as he is* can reach a true knowledge of God.”<sup>10</sup>

The Barthian thought is not therefore a cosmological dualism that shuts God off from all relation to his world. Barth writes: “We live in the *world*, and this world is God’s *world*, created, sustained, and ruled by him.”<sup>11</sup> But he adds: “We live in a world that is modified by the apostasy of man from God, by man’s having cut himself off from God, having set himself in opposition to God, having become his enemy.”<sup>12</sup>

Can the Barthian position be maintained? Those who criticize it hasten to quote the nineteenth Psalm: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament showeth his handiwork.” But the quotation of this passage is really beside the point. The man who wrote the psalm gives seven of its fourteen verses to a meditation on the law of Jehovah. He is a man who has come to know God through his Word. He finds in nature the God whom he has already come to know in his Word. The Barthians would never deny that the Christian who has found God in Jesus Christ will have eyes to see in the world of nature the God whom he has come to

know in Christ. The Barthian position is that man cannot rise from nature to God. Apart from revelation the world of nature conceals as much as it reveals. The Barthian position here is just the placing of the divine No! on this attempt of man to build a bridge to God that man in his failure may be humble enough to wait for God to speak to him through his Word.

McConnachie beautifully sums up the real heart of the Barthian contention: "In a world which has fallen out of its original unity with its Creator, we can still see his tracks, but they are the tracks of a Great Unknown. Not in Nature, any more than in History, nor in Religion, apart from Revelation, says Barth, is God to be found. Nature is not capable of revealing what is beyond the relativity of concrete existence. *Finitum non capax infiniti*. We can only come to know God the Creator through God the Reconciler, as he gives himself to be known in the Word of the Cross."<sup>13</sup>

In harmony with his general position, Barth asserts that man cannot find God by the study of the soul of man. Theology is not anthropology because God is qualitatively distinct from man. "It is evident that the relation to God with which the Bible is concerned does not have its source in the purple depths of the subconscious, and cannot be identical with what the deep-sea psychical research of our day describes in the narrower or broader sense as libido fulfilment."<sup>14</sup>

Brunner states the position against which the Barthian attack is pointed: "The heart of the philosophical idealism

assumes that man in the inmost depths of his being is divine—divine in the respect that the consciousness of the highest and best in human nature constitutes also the consciousness of the eternally divine.”<sup>15</sup> “Man finds God in the depths of nature, be it human or sub-human nature; in the depth of his soul. God is the essence or substance of the empirical world; he is not other than the world, other than I.”<sup>16</sup>

In his *Theology of Crisis*, Brunner sums up the grave religious objections which he brings against the idea of immanence as set forth in modern theology. As the heart of his thought is contained here, we do well to consider them carefully:

1. “The God who is identical with the depths of the world or the soul is not really God.”<sup>17</sup> The thought here seems to be that when man finds God by the deification of the highest in himself, he does not really find God. This God is the creation of the mind of man. He is after all a concept of thought and as such he does not stand over man and confront him. The God who is reached at the far end of a long process of doubtful reasoning is too much of an abstraction to save the world. The God who is the result of man’s examination of himself is not the Living God. He is an idol that man has put between man and God. The Barthians would not deny that man can have thoughts about God. They would admit that as a system of philosophy, theism is more satisfactory than atheism. Their contention is that the God who is reached in this way, the God of Greek philosophy, is not to be identified with the God of the Bible who speaks his word to men through Jesus Christ. The

Call of the Student Christian Movement sums the thought up in a passage which we feel would meet with Brunner's approval: "This relativism in thought and morals is based on the reduction of God to a mere ideal: no more than a concept in which man sums up his highest insights and aspirations and his most organic system of values. Even when ultimate reality is not thought of as simply a projection of human desires, the divine is formulated in such abstract and bloodless categories as to be unavailing for the true purpose of life and thought."<sup>18</sup>

2. "Such a God is not really personal. What is not personal cannot be my superior, but must be my inferior. For the personal is above the impersonal. A God whom I shall have to know through an interpretation of the world or of myself is less than I am because I give utterance to him who himself is dumb, as it were. He becomes a personality only through me."<sup>19</sup> What Brunner has in mind in particular is the Hegelian philosophy which conceives of God as expressing himself through nature and history. But his contention is a true criticism of all thoroughgoing systems of immanence. Here is a passage on which a preacher states his conception of the immanence of God: "The relation of this Infinite Power, or God, to the universe, is the same as the relation of man's soul to his body. The universe as we see it is God's body; then God is the soul of the universe, just as you are the soul of your body. Can you lay your finger on yourself? Is your hand you? Is your brain you? Where are *you*? Can you localize you in your body? You pervade your body through and through. You are immanent

in your body. There is not one atom of your body where *you* are not—but still, *you* are not your body.”<sup>20</sup>

We have here the familiar illustration of the soul and the body. It is given as a perfect illustration of the relation of the immanent God to the world. But we need to remember that the soul expresses itself through the body, and that apart from the body it does not become known. If we press the analogy to its real meaning, we come to the conclusion that God must express himself through the world. It is against this that Brunner is contending.

3. “This religion of immanence is not really based upon faith. Faith is an answer to a call, a response to a challenge. An immanent God, however, neither calls me nor challenges me. He does not demand a decision. In fact a decision is not even possible. The religion of immanence excludes decision because the Divine is supposed to be identical with the deepest self of man. Man is not asked to choose one or another alternative, for man is already in God and God in him. Man is on the safe side before he makes a decision.”<sup>21</sup> In discussing this position of Brunner, we do well to notice that under the influence of the prevalence of the conception of divine immanence, the definition of faith in modern theology stands in direct conflict with its meaning in the faith of the Reformers. In the thought of the Reformer’s faith is the response of man to the Word spoken by God in Jesus Christ. In the thought of Luther, faith does not exist apart from promise. It is the thrusting of life out on a promise of God and the *daring* God to fail to keep his word. Faith is a giving up of hope in ourselves

and a letting down on God. Faith is the surrender of man to God. The emphasis is on its receptivity. It is the assent of man in which he consents to receive the reconciliation wrought out by God in Christ. In the thought of modern theology, faith has tended to take a different meaning. Faith moves in the realm of interpretation and value. It is an assumption concerning the purpose of life which a man makes. It is verified in experience. A man makes an heroic assumption concerning the meaning of life and determines to live as if his assumption is true. As he does so, he finds God. The real distinction between the two is that in one God is at the beginning of the process and in the other God is at the end of the process. The change which has been made in the interpretation of faith practically constitutes a proof of the correctness of Brunner's contention. Faith in the biblical sense is possible only when God speaks to man, not from him.

4. "But for this reason, man never becomes a real personality. For decision is the essence of personality. Only when a man comes to a crisis and is compelled to choose between life and death does he become a personality. At the very moment when God challenges him to make his decision man is given personality. Faith and personality are identical. Apart from faith, which constitutes man's decision, personality is not to be found. Man becomes personal when his own will is broken by the will of the Lord. An impersonal God and an impersonal man are the necessary and inevitable consequences of a religion of immanence."<sup>22</sup>

In *The Word and the World*, Brunner continues the dis-



cussion: "It is the Christian who makes the bold assertion that man becomes man only in hearing the Word of God. To be a person is not a condition or state; it is not a fact of nature, like being a European or a Negro; to be a person is an act. It is, however, not that act in which—according to Fichte—man creates himself; it is the act in which he receives his being from the hand of God." <sup>23</sup>

We sum up the Barthian conclusion in the words of Barth himself: "There is no way from us to God—not even *via negativa*—not even a *via dialectica* nor *paradoxa*. The god who stood at the end of some human way—even of this way—would not be God." <sup>24</sup>

It is here that Barth has been vehemently attacked. Zerbe says that Barth is practically agnostic, that he is weakest where weakness is certain to mean failure, in his doctrine of God.<sup>25</sup> But surely we show a complete misunderstanding of the position of Barth when we accuse him of being agnostic in his doctrine of God. The agnostic says: "There may be a God. There may not be. I do not know. There is no convincing evidence that God exists." This is not the position of Barth. Barth says that there is no way from man to God. If he had stopped there, we could accuse him of being agnostic, but Barth goes on and asserts that the only way between God and man is that which leads from God to man.<sup>26</sup> This way he finds in *Jesus Christ*.<sup>27</sup> It is one thing to knock down all the idols men have known and to put nothing in their place. It is a very different thing to destroy the idols men have created

that they may turn from them and listen to the Living God as he speaks to men in his Word.

Dr. Pauck defends Barth from the charge of agnosticism and in a vivid passage gives the secret of his destructive criticism. He writes: . . . "because he has been awed by eternity, because he has heard its thunders and seen its lightnings, he has become 'a voice in the wilderness,' speaking of judgment over time, calling to repentance. He shouts his 'No' to the 'realities' of this world, because he knows of the 'Yes' which is not of this world. Frantically he points to this firm pole. Nothing must be in the way of those who want to see it. He therefore knocks down everything that obstructs the view. The king of Glory shall come in. There cannot, shall not be any other glory but his." (*Karl Barth*, 134.)

It is from this point of view that Barth directs his attack against the traditional arguments for the existence of God. To Barth they yield thoughts about God, but they do not bring us to the God who speaks in the Bible. How then would Barth prove the existence of God? He would not prove it. He would deny man's ability to reach this conclusion as the result of logical demonstrations. To Barth the existence of God becomes a reality to man when God speaks to him. From one point of view this is no proof at all. From another point of view it puts man where proof is unnecessary. In the Old Testament God is known through his Word. Moses does not reason to the existence of God. God speaks to Moses, and in his Word God is known, and Moses goes forth with an assurance he could never have

reached by argument. The Word of God comes to Amos as he feeds his flocks on the hills of Northern Israel, and Amos goes forth as a prophet of God. The Christian today picks up his Bible, and from its sacred page God speaks to him. When this happens he does not need arguments to establish the existence of the God whose voice he has heard. Thus the Barthian conclusion is that natural theology gives merely thoughts about God. God himself is known only as he reveals himself in his Word.

It is along the line of their criticism of immanence that the Barthians object to the modern emphasis on the Fatherhood of God. They do not object to the term in its true New Testament sense in which it is used to describe the relation of God to those who through Christ have been set in a saving relation to him. Sonship in the New Testament applies primarily to those who have been justified and adopted. The objection to the term really moves along two lines. The first is its tendency to break down the qualitative distinction between God and man. This as we have seen is absolutely essential to the whole Barthian position. Fatherhood means kinship, and the danger is that when men use the term they will forget the real difference between God and man. The whole idea is apt to lead to that easy familiarity with God that the Barthians abhor.

The second objection to the term is to the modern use of it to emphasize the love of God at the expense of his other attributes. Barth does not deny the love of God as it is revealed in Calvary. He quotes Kierkegaard with approval: "The bird on the branch, the lily in the meadow,

the stag in the forest, the fish in the sea, and countless joyful people sing: God is love! But under all these sopranos, as it were a sustained bass part, sounds the *de profundis* of the sacrificed: God is love.”<sup>28</sup> But in modern thought the Fatherhood of God has been used to emphasize his love to the exclusion of a proper emphasis on his justice and his wrath. It is this abuse of the term which caused Dr. Patton to remark that when the full truth was known about God he would probably be as much unlike the average American father as he would differ from the average American judge.<sup>29</sup> The change in the meaning of the term is well brought out in two stories concerning the use of the Lord’s prayer—the prayer which begins: “Our Father which art in Heaven.” According to tradition this prayer was the last thing that the early Christians taught to the catechumens in their course in preparation for receiving the sacrament of Baptism.<sup>30</sup> The reason for this was that, in their thought, no man could call God Father until by the new birth he had become a son of God. In contrast to this, when the Parliament of Religions met a few years ago, the only prayer in which the mixed multitude, representative of all the faiths on earth, could join was the Lord’s prayer. The Barthians believe in the Fatherhood of God. They object to the modern abuse of the term.

We have listened to Barth as he asserts that God is not to be found in nature and that the knowledge of him does not come from the soul of man. We come now to his positive teaching. He asserts that God reveals himself in his Word and only in his Word. A passage from Luther’s

*Table Talk* is quoted with approval: "Although God is omnipresent, he is nowhere; I cannot lay hold of him by my own thoughts without the Word. . . . God cannot be found in his majesty—that is, outside of his revelation of himself in his Word. The majesty of God is too exalted and grand for us to be able to grasp it. . . . The world seeks in innumerable ways, with great industry, cost, trouble, and labor, to find the invisible and incomprehensible God in his majesty. But God is and remains to them unknown, although they have many thoughts about him . . . for God has decreed that he will be unknowable and unapprehensible apart from Christ.<sup>31</sup>

This brings us to the heart of the Barthian thought, to their doctrine of the Word of God. Unto the study of this the next chapter is given.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE BARTHIAN DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

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"FOR GOD'S WORD Barth goes to the Scriptures. He takes his stand on Calvin's central doctrine of the Word of God. 'We do not seek God anywhere else than in his Word. We do not think of him save with his Word, we speak nothing of him save through his Word.'" <sup>1</sup>

But Barth distinguishes three forms of the Word of God. In this he is true to his fundamental principle of the qualitative distinction between God and man. To Barth there must be a difference between the Word of God and the Word of Man. The first form of the Word is, therefore, the Word which is spoken in the world of eternity. To use Barth's language: "Revelation, however (original revelation), means the very first, the real Word of God—without the medium of the written Word, without the service of the Church—we mean the Word of God, in and of itself which claims the former medium and the latter service, i.e., the utterance of God which took place once and for all time, certainly in history (how else could it be testified to in history), but in the more than historical pre-history about which the prophets and apostles bear testimony." <sup>2</sup> This is the Word of God in its first form. It is not to be identified with the text of Scripture.

"We see ourselves referred from the preaching of the church to the Bible and in turn from the Bible to revelation. This last conception is then the very top of the mountain above which there is just one thing more—namely, Heaven."<sup>3</sup> "The Word of God is Word of God in its first original form or address in which it was uttered directly and exclusively in history, but at the limit of history, in pre-history."<sup>4</sup>

The second form of the Word of God is found in the testimony to it of those to whom God has spoken. He says: "The Word of God is Word of God in its second form or address in which it enters into the Word of a definite category of man, i.e., the witnesses of revelation, the testimony of the prophets and the apostles."<sup>5</sup> As we understand it, therefore, the second form of the Word of God is the testimony of man to the Revelation which he has received from God. Amos towers as a prophet of God before sinning Israel as he says: "Hear this Word that the Lord hath spoken against you, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities."<sup>6</sup> Before Amos spoke to Israel, the Word of God spoke to him. The message which he delivered to Israel was his testimony to the revelation he had received. The two, in the thought of Barth, are very closely related, but they are not to be identified. To give another illustration, the Word spoken to the Apostles as they stood in the presence of the resurrection life of Christ would belong to the first form of the Word of God. The testimony of the

apostles would belong to the second form. In harmony with this approach, the written Word is the record which we have of the testimony of the prophets and apostles. It is their witness to the revelation which they received.

The third form of the Word of God is the Word of God in the sermon. "The Word of God is Word of God in its third form or address in which it through the instrumentality of the written Word becomes the content of the Christian proclamation."<sup>7</sup> The thought here is that as man humbles himself in the presence of the divine word in the Scriptures, the same Spirit that spoke to those who wrote the Scriptures speaks to him and gives him the content of the Christian proclamation that he is to deliver through the sermon.

But Barth finishes his study with the quotation of the Latin sentence, "*Verbum domini manet in aeternum*"<sup>8</sup> (The word of the Lord remains in eternity). He never permits himself to lose sight of his fundamental principle in which he holds that man's word is not God's Word. God speaks through the frail and fallible words of men, but Barth never identifies the Word of God and the Word of man.

Dr. Pauck sums up the Barthian position: "The words of the prophets and apostles of the Bible are the authority for the sermon of the Christian Church. The historic tradition of the message of the men of the Bible is authoritative for the Christian Church only because it points to the super-historical revelation of God. It is no '*Paulus dixit*' (Paul said) that is the imperative which the Christian Church obeys, but the '*Deus dixit*' in the words of Paul.



The Word in the words of the Bible, God's Word behind the words of the apostles, the revelation without which the testimony of the apostles could not have been given."<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Zerbe gives his understanding of Barth's teaching: "Barth accordingly teaches that after textual and literary-historical criticism and inquiry into the canon have completed their respective tasks, and given us the Bible as we have it, there is back of and underneath all the self-authenticating character of the Bible, mediated and vouchsafed through the Holy Spirit, which is the final court of appeal."<sup>10</sup>

If asked how man is to hear the Word of God which the Barthians say lies behind the text of Scriptures but is not to be identified with it, Barth would say that man hears the Word of God through faith. According to him, we have in the Bible a revelation, but a veiled revelation. It is accessible to faith but only to faith. The Holy Spirit speaks from the Scripture to man at the "existential moment" and authenticates the Word in his heart. This position is related to the third of the organizing principles of the Barthian thought as the Barthian distinction between the Word of God and the Word of Man is related to the first of these principles. To Barth the Bible is not an objective statement of truth to which believer and unbeliever alike can go for knowledge. The Bible is a veiled revelation and the man who goes to it as a spectator cannot hear its message. He claims that the Bible gives its message only to those who surrender to it.

Brunner gives an admirable statement of this position

and as an understanding of it is essential to an understanding of the Barthian thought of Scripture, we quote the whole passage: "The Christian Church can never afford to forsake its base: the Scriptures—and the Scriptures alone are God's Word. What I said of God incarnate is true of the revelation in the Bible; to be a real revelation it must be veiled. The Word of God in the Scriptures is as little to be identified with the words of the Scriptures as the Christ according to the flesh is to be identified with the Christ according to the spirit. The words of the Scriptures are human; that is, God makes use of human and, therefore, frail and fallible words of men who are liable to err. But men and their words are the means through which God speaks to men and in men. Only through a serious misunderstanding will genuine faith find satisfaction in the theory of verbal inspiration of the Bible. In fact, this misrepresents what true faith conceives the Bible to be. He who identifies the letters and words of the Scriptures with the Word of God has never truly understood the Word of God; he does not know what constitutes revelation. A better witness than Martin Luther we can scarcely call up. No man ever lived who knew better than he what the Bible is to the Christian. And Martin Luther, with full appreciation of what he was saying, placed side by side these two statements: 'The Scriptures alone are God's Word'; and 'they are the cradle in which Christ is laid.' Need it be mentioned that he busied himself with biblical criticism. If one were to say that biblical criticism is possible in spite of faith in the Bible, one would lay one's self open to the charge of

prevarication. He who would know what constitutes the Word of God in the Bible must devote himself to biblical criticism. And let it be understood, to searching, fearless, radical criticism. For it is really God's will that we shall hear his Word and not mistake ancient cosmology and Israelitish chronology for the Word of God."<sup>11</sup>

Passages such as those that have been given show clearly that the Barthian thought is not a return to the fundamentalist position of an inerrant word. Brunner and Barth both come from Germany. The background of their thought moves in a land in which the conclusions of biblical criticism have been accepted by the majority of scholars. The Barthians may differ in many ways from the generally accepted positions of the critics of the Old and New Testaments. As we shall see later, the Barthian point of view will certainly affect many of the philosophic presuppositions on which the critics have worked. But the Barthian movement frankly acknowledges the right of criticism to examine the text of the Bible. Barth says: "The Bible is the literary monument of an ancient racial religion and of a Hellenistic cultus religion of the Near East. A human document like any other, it can lay no priori dogmatic claim to special attention and consideration. This judgment being announced by every tongue and believed in every territory, we may take for granted today. We need not continue trying to break through an open door."<sup>12</sup>

Thus the Barthians ascribe their authority to the *content* of Scripture rather than to the *form* of Scripture. In this they are influenced, of course, by the theological atmos-

phere which surrounds them. But too much emphasis must not be placed on the influence of their background. Barth and Brunner are both original in their thought. They have not feared in other things to break with the thought of their contemporaries. The real reason for the freedom of their attitude toward the Bible is that it is in harmony with the principles from which they start. Their conception of the otherness of God leads them to refuse to identify the words of man with the Word of God. Their conception of spiritual truth as grasped only through faith leads them to think of the Bible as a veiled revelation which is accessible to faith and to faith alone.

The authority which the Barthians ascribe to Scripture relates, therefore, to its divine content. They assert that in one sense of the word the Bible is a human book. They make no attempt to defend its freedom from minor errors and contradictions. But they do assert that the message which the Bible speaks to those who hear its Word in faith carries with it the note of *authority*. Brunner writes: "What is peculiar about the prophet is not his person, not what he is, but what he has, namely, the Word of God. To the prophet it is given to say what no man can say, what God alone says—the Word from outside all human possibilities, therefore the Word which is no general truth, the Word which has to be explicitly communicated. Hence it does not matter who the prophet is; all depends upon whether or not he really has a divine word, a divine message. If he has it—as the Old Testament conception holds—

then a new value emerges, totally different from teacher, example, or genius; viz., *authority*.”<sup>13</sup>

In this respect the Barthian position is similar to the general position held by the Scotch theologians of today and stated by Principal Lindsay when he said: “When the Reformers distinguished between the Word of God and the Scripture which conveys or presents it, and when they declared that the authority and infallibility of that Word belong to the region of faith, they made that authority and infallibility altogether independent of questions that might be raised about the human agencies through which the book came into its present shape.”<sup>14</sup> It is a disputed question as to just how accurately Principal Lindsay has presented the Reformation conception of Scripture, but it is clear that the view which he presents here is in harmony with the Barthian thought. The Barthians differ from the Scotch theologians in that their fundamental premises give them a reason for taking this position which the Scotch theologians do not fully share.

In the presentation of the Barthian thought of Scripture, we need to study their idea of the subordination of the Scriptures to Christ. Brunner presents this: “For the true Christian the Bible is not a divine oracle of instruction; it is the testimony or witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The revelation of God is not a book or a doctrine, but a living person. The relation between the Scripture and this person is clearly one of subordination: ‘Search the Scriptures . . . and they are they which testify of me,’ or, to use the words of Luther: ‘Christ is King and Lord of Scrip-

ture.' He, perhaps the most congenial interpreter of Scripture the Church has ever had, explicitly asserted the subordination of the Scripture to Christ, in such well-known utterances as these: 'The Scriptures are the crib, wherein Christ is laid'; 'If our enemies uphold the Scriptures against Christ, we on the other hand uphold Christ against the Scriptures'; 'The Scriptures are apostolic and canonical in so far as they teach Christ, and no further'; 'It is for Christ's sake that we believe in the Scriptures, but it is not for the Scriptures' sake that we believe in Christ.'<sup>15</sup>

The subordination of the Scriptures to Christ is true to the best teaching of the Church. The Scriptures testify of Christ and their supreme importance lies in that testimony. We need the Bible because through the Bible and through the Bible alone can we know and understand Christ. But the implication that underlies the assertion of Brunner does not necessarily follow. The subordination of the Scriptures to Christ does not prove the fallibility of the biblical record. There is no necessary contradiction in the thought of orthodoxy in which she claims that the Word of God spoken through Christ has been witnessed to by a written record that is free from error.

The Barthian thought of the Word of God has been presented as impartially as possible. The study needs to be completed by a consideration of the relation of their thought to the two positions against which they fight, i.e., the modern conception of the Bible and the orthodox view with its belief in verbal inspiration. The former of these will be treated first.

While the Barthian thought of Scripture unquestionably conflicts with some aspects of the orthodox position, we need to remember that the great fight of the Barthian movement is against modernism. In many ways they have a close affinity with the fundamentalists. They have declared open war with modernism. Wherein does the Barthian position challenge the modern conception of Scripture?

The Barthians take issue with the modern thought of Scripture as a record of the experiences of men in their search for God. This position has been summarized by Dr. Fosdick in the Preface to his book on *The Meaning of Prayer*. "In endeavoring to clear away the difficulties that hamper fellowship with this living God, the book has used the Scripture as the basis of its thought. But the passages of Scripture are not employed as proof texts to establish an opinion; they are uniformly used as descriptions of an experience which men have actually had with God. In a study such as this, the Bible is the invaluable laboratory manual which records all phases of man's life with God and God's dealing with man."<sup>16</sup> The view is characteristic of modernism, which in harmony with its underlying principles starts with man and thinks of the Bible as the record of man's spiritual pilgrimage. It is characteristic in its emphasis on experience and its ignoring of the idea of revelation. The Barthian view starts with God. It thinks of the Bible as the record of the testimony of man to a God-given revelation. Thus Barth writes: "It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about man. The Bible tells

us not how we should talk with God, but what he says to us; not how we shall find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ." <sup>17</sup>

Barth criticizes the modern concern with the form of Scripture and emphasizes the necessity of a drive from form to content. The modern age has been so desperately concerned in its attempt to show the fallibility of the Scripture record that it has forgotten to concern itself with the content of the message of Scripture. Barth, as we have seen, admits the right of criticism to examine the form of Scripture. His accusation is that the critics have stopped at the point which is the real starting point of the true exegete. He says: "For it is too clear that intelligent and fruitful discussion of the Bible begins when the judgment as to its human, its historical, and its psychological character has been made and put behind us. Would that the teachers of our high and lower schools, and with them the progressive element among the clergy of our established churches, would forthwith resolve to have done with a battle that once *had* its time but has now *had* it! The special *content* of this human document, the remarkable *something* with *which* the writers of these stories and those who stood behind them were concerned, the biblical object—this is the question that will engage and engross us today." <sup>18</sup>

It is the principle which Barth followed in his com-



mentary on Romans. He criticized the commentators of the day because they failed to go back of form to content. They filled pages with the study of the possible constructions that could be put on the sentences. They gave exhaustive studies of the meanings of Greek words. They never concerned themselves to give the message of the book to their generation. For an illustration of Barth's thought here we might compare Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* with Burton's *Commentary* on the same book. In Luther's work the centuries fall away and the message of Paul to the first century became the message of Paul to the sixteenth. In Burton's work a great scholar takes a detached position and exhausts himself in getting at the meaning of Paul without making any attempt to bring the message to bear on the problems of his age. Barth went back to the Reformation conception of what a commentary should attempt, and produced his commentary on Romans. Dr. Pauck gives a description of it: "It differed from ordinary exegetical works. It acknowledged the insight gained by historical research, but it was far from being a historical commentary. Taking it for granted that Paul as a child of his age spoke to his contemporaries, Barth attempted to show that, as a prophet and apostle of the Kingdom of God, he spoke to all men of all times. His entire attention was directed toward the eternal spirit of the Bible in and beyond that which is merely historical. The strong voice of Paul was made to be heard in our time . . . the author of this commentary lets Paul preach to our own time. The world of the ancient Jews becomes the world of the twentieth century—and the

righteousness of God as the gospel portrays it is brought to bear on this world. Recognizes God as God! that is the message.”<sup>19</sup>

Barth declares war on the philosophy of evolution that underlies the modern conception of Scripture. The idea of evolution was central to the thinking of the last generation. In harmony with this, modern thought sought to explain Scripture as the result of a gradual process of upward development that culminated in the appearance of Jesus Christ. This philosophy has lain at the heart of much of the reconstruction of the history of the Old Testament. The Bible in its present form does not fit in with any philosophy of evolution. Its ideas cannot be traced as coming from a process of orderly development in which each stage prepares for the stage to follow. The attempt to make the Bible fit into this scheme has meant that men have been forced to play strange tricks with the biblical narrative. Barth in characteristic style attacks the whole position: “Biblical history in the Old and New Testaments is not really history at all, but seen from above is a series of free divine acts and seen from below a series of fruitless attempts to undertake something in itself impossible. From the viewpoint of ordered development in particular and in general it is quite incomprehensible—as every religious teacher who is worth his salt knows only too well.”<sup>20</sup> The Barthian philosophy of history must be discussed in another place. But we see here that the fundamental Barthian thought thinks of the Bible as the result of movements which came down from God. The Bible is the result of the breaking into history of

that other world of which Barth speaks so often. As McConachie presents his ideas: "There is no such thing as evolution, not even saltatory evolution, in the Old Testament. It is not an evolution, but an ingression which we find there, a breaking into the world of something beyond, something new and other."<sup>21</sup>

This position of Barth comes into conflict with the whole modern conception of progressive revelation. The conception has been put forward by modern theologians to relieve certain difficulties which they find in the Old Testament. The Old Testament gives divine sanction to laws which they do not consider to be in harmony with God's revelation of himself in Christ. The Old Testament recognizes slavery; regulates polygamy; permits divorce in some cases; commands wars; and punishes apostasy in religion with death. Modern theologians feel that these and other things are not in harmony with the teachings of Christ. They seek to explain them as the result of a progressive revelation. According to their thought, God reveals himself gradually as his people are able to bear the revelation. On this basis, the difficulties in the Old Testament cease to be troublesome. They are explained as illustrations of stages in the gradual movement toward Christ. The thought of a progressive revelation has never been popular in conservative circles because it surrenders the unity of the Scripture. Conservative thought can admit the idea of development in revelation. Monotheism is taught in the Old Testament, and the doctrine of the Trinity is found in the New. Orthodox thought can admit a fuller revelation that develops that

which was already implicit in the Old. It cannot admit a revelation that transcends the old and renders the old untrue. As the whole purpose of the modern doctrine of progressive revelation is to relieve the moral problems which men find in the Old Testament, its value lies in the fact that it does seek to transcend the old and render the old untrue. Thus, conservative thought has never accepted the modern thought of progressive revelation. It has not ignored the problems that the conception of progressive revelation was framed to deal with, but it has sought to deal with them by an apologetic that met the problem without destroying the unity of Scripture.

In the attack on the idea of progressive revelation, the Barthians are therefore at one with the fundamentalists. In harmony with this position Barth and Brunner are restoring a lost emphasis on the Old Testament. Brunner says: "We need the Bible because through this tradition alone can we know and understand Christ. This holds true of the Old Testament as well as of the New. Christ cannot be understood without the Old Testament."<sup>22</sup> Barth finds his authority in "the Scriptures themselves, and not the Scriptures interpreted by any particular tradition; *the whole Scriptures* and not a part of them chosen to suit a preconceived theory."<sup>23</sup> Dr. Chapman says: "Nothing can be more emphatic than the way in which on page after page Brunner insists on the uniqueness of revelation in the Bible—in the Old Testament as well as in the New. After the way in which the Old Testament has been almost discarded in many quarters, it is refreshing to find its value

fully recognized.”<sup>24</sup> In his *Mediator*, Brunner says: “To Christian faith Scripture is a unity. Old and New Testaments have at bottom only one word of God to proclaim, the one Christ-word. . . . The Christian faith asserts not only the unity, but the exclusive unity of biblical revelation. This Word of God is also in the Old, as well as in the New Testament, the Word of Jesus Christ, the Word that in Jesus Christ is reality—not the letter but the Word, the Word of God of the Old and New Testaments is the same.”<sup>25</sup>

The last quotation brings out, however, the difference between the Barthian and the orthodox position. The Barthians are using the expression, Word of God, to carry a different meaning from that which the same expression carries in orthodox terminology. The Barthians are referring to the Word in its first form, to the Word that is testified to in the Scripture record, but is not identical with it. Thus while the Barthians do not admit the idea of progressive revelation, they are able in harmony with their premises to deal with the problems that the conception of progressive revelation was framed to remove. These can be explained away as errors due to the imperfect reception of the prophet. McConnachie sums up Barth’s thought: “But even in the prophets and apostles, it is not the divine Word itself which we hear, but the witness of a prophet or apostle, a word concerning the Word, and not the perfect Divine Word itself. *There may be errors in the prophet due to his imperfect reception.* For while the Word of God speaks to him, he first speaks the Word to himself before he

utters it to others. It meets and strikes him in his opposition, and becomes itself an 'offense.' "26 The Barthians are in harmony with the orthodox thought in their attack on the thought of progressive revelation. They break with orthodoxy in their admission of the possibility of error in the testimony of the prophet to the Word.

The Barthians break with modern thought in their claim that the Word of God speaks from the Bible and only from the Bible. Modern theology has sought to break down the uniqueness of revelation in the Bible. The prophets have been presented as different in degrees, but not in kind, from the spiritual seers of other religions. The bearer of the Word of God has been turned into a religious genius. Christianity has been fitted into its place in a philosophy of religion. It contains more truth than the other religions. It is the best religion that we have. The absolute nature of Christianity is denied. Its points of agreement with other religions are emphasized, and the points in which it comes into contradiction with the faiths of the world are minimized. In such a scheme the Bible fits into a place of honor that differs only in degree from the honor ascribed to the sacred books of other religions. Modernism with its emphasis on the religious consciousness as the source of doctrine has become capable of adaptation and change. An illustration from the field of politics will bring out the fundamental difference. Great Britain has no constitution which is preserved in a written document that her legislators must not violate. The constitution of Britain is preserved in the hearts of her people. The legislators receive their

instructions from the people and are, in the last analysis, responsible only to them. The United States of America bases its laws on a constitution, which is a written document. Even if a law is passed it cannot be enforced if it is declared by the Supreme Court to be out of harmony with the constitution on which the government is based. As a matter of fact the difference between the two forms of government is more apparent than real. The people of the United States produced the constitution and put it in the provision for its change by the will of the people. The source of authority continues to rest with the people. The people have often amended the constitution. If they wished to they could abolish it. But for the sake of illustration, let us suppose that the constitution had not come into existence in this manner. Let us suppose instead that at the beginning of the history of the American nation a Word of God had been given to our forefathers, in which God himself laid down the fundamental principles on which the government of this nation was to be based. And let us suppose that the document which preserved the record of this revelation did not have within it any clause which recognized the right of the people to amend the document on which their government was to be built. We would then have a situation in government which would correspond to the situation in the world of religion. The illustration is in no sense a caricature. The possession of such a document might be the highest trust ever given to the American people. Their loyalty to it might be their highest duty and the only guarantee of the security of their political institutions.

In the confusion in government around them it might become the solid rock on which the life of the nation was to be built. If such a document existed, the life of the nation would in time be split into two parties. One party would recognize the absolute authority of the constitution and would demand that the life of the nation be made to conform to it. Another party would claim that it was intolerable to have their government bound to a revelation given centuries ago. They would assert that the true seat of authority in government was to be found in the will of the people.

As a matter of fact, no such document exists or ever has existed in the field of government. In this field God has left men to work out for themselves the basis on which their institutions of government are to be built. But it is the conviction of conservative Christianity that in the field of religion man is not able to reach truth by his own exertions. In the field of religion truth has been given by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. As all that we know of Jesus Christ is found in the Bible, truth must come through the Bible and the Bible alone. Modernism, on the other hand, puts its emphasis on the validity of religious experience. She finds her constitution not in an outside authority, but in the hearts of Christians. To her the Christian heart is the best theologian. Ultimately the source of authority rests in the religious consciousness.

The Barthians challenge this position of modernism and hold man in his search for truth to the Word of God that speaks from the Bible. Brunner writes: "Fervent Chris-



tians have often resented the fact that the Word of Jesus Christ was fixed in writing and put together in a holy book. As a matter of fact, the book does not necessarily belong to Christian faith. It would be possible, abstractly, to conceive of the Christian Church without the New Testament, the tradition and testimony being carried on simply as the living voice of the Church. But what would have happened even by the second century with such a tradition? We know that it would have become pagan mythology. Whereas the living voice of the Church reminds us that *omne vivum ex vivo nascitur*, that the Word of God has always to be a present word, in order to be really God's Word, his Word to me; on the other hand, the commitment to writing reminds us that the Word of God is a unique historical event which took place once and for all between the years 1 to 30 of our Christian era." 27

He comments further: "Nothing seems so repulsive to the man of our time as the idea that he should have to look for truth in a book which was written eighteen hundred years ago. . . . If the modern man feels himself rather repelled than attracted by the Bible, it is because of the rationalism which will not permit him to acknowledge any authority in matters of truth outside of himself." 28

The strongest proof of the Barthian tying up of truth to the Bible comes from an unexpected source. Dr. Pauck writes from the background of the liberal school of Chicago. His interest has been caught by the Barthian movement. He agrees with Barth in his attack on the "self-sufficiency which is the core of modernism." He objects to what he

calls the Barthian Biblicism. In his statements we have, therefore, the admissions of a man who has been forced to find that which he does not want to find. He objects to the Barthian Biblicism, but he is forced to admit that this is a true statement of Barth's position. Dr. Pauck's criticisms of Barth will do much to command the Barthian movement to conservative scholars. He writes of Barth: "He remains the Protestant preacher and theologian. His philosophy of religion becomes a theology, an ecclesiastical theology. *The Bible is his final authority after all.* It alone is the instrument of salvation. God is confined to the words of the biblical witnesses. The revelation took place in Palestine, A.D., 1-30, once, in Jesus Christ. *Deus dixit.* God has spoken."<sup>29</sup> "The method which he really follows is characterized by the acceptance of ecclesiastical tradition *and of biblical authority.*"<sup>30</sup> "Upon such a theological foundation one can only erect the building of a New Scholasticism."<sup>31</sup> "He strives to restore a definitely Christian concept of the revelation. He thinks on the basis of the Christian belief that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. It is in reference to this specific theology that we must object to Barthianism, for it becomes finally a restoration of Christian traditionalism."<sup>32</sup>

In a strong sentence Dr. Pauck sums up a modernist's objection to Barthianism: "The absoluteness of the truth of the Christian religion as it is based upon the belief in God's exclusive revelation in Jesus Christ, can no longer be asserted in the old ways, not even in modernized old ways."<sup>33</sup> In this respect Barth and Brunner declare war to the end

with modern thought. They do assert that the truth of Christianity is absolute. They continue to believe that God's revelation in Jesus Christ is exclusive. They are of the opinion that they can make this assertion and that they can make it in the midst of the confusion of modern life.

In the Barthian thought the Word of God comes through an event in the past. At the same time the Word speaks in the present tense. Brunner writes: "On the other hand, the revelation of God is not a *perfectum* as the orthodox see it; what would a perfect or finished something, that was and is no more, be for me today? But the revelation of God is, if I may say so, a *perfectum praesens*—that which happened then and there in Jesus Christ, and also that which as such God is saying to me here today. Hence the statement that God's Word speaks to us in the Holy Scriptures has at once to be supplemented by adding that the Word of the Bible is the Word of God to *us* only in so far as God's Holy Spirit opens our ears so that we can hear his voice in the words of the apostles." <sup>34</sup> The Word of God, however, that speaks in the present tense does not add to the truth spoken in Christ. We do not go beyond Christ. The purpose of the Spirit is to bring home to us the truth spoken in Jesus Christ.

We are merely making explicit that which is already implicit in what has been said when we say that the Barthians clash with modernism in that the Barthians deny that religious truth comes through reason. Brunner uses reason to signify "man's capacity to know from himself outward." He writes: "Everything which the apostles, who speak to us

in the New Testament, the great Church Fathers, or the creeds of the Churches from the Apostles' Creed down to the Thirty-nine Articles and the Westminster Confession, wanted to express is this one thing: That into the world of men with their ethics, their metaphysics and their religions there has entered something different, something which is distinguished not gradually or quantitatively, but qualitatively and fundamentally, from everything which man can know from himself outward. And that something is the Word of God." <sup>35</sup>

Brunner finds the heart of sin in man's refusal to be humbled, in his refusal to admit that truth must come to him from a source outside himself. "Here lies the real cause of man's antagonism to faith. . . . We do not believe revelation because we will not be humbled. . . . The source of antagonism against faith is the *pride* of reason. . . . This pride, this claim of reason to be the last court of appeal, the supreme judge of truth, constitutes sin; it is the heart of sin. . . . It is, however, not merely an expression of a modern sin, but of the original sin of man, from which come the ruin and the shambles of the human race." <sup>36</sup>

The study of the Barthian attack on the modern conception of Scripture needs to be followed by a consideration of the relation between the Barthian thought of Scripture and the view held by orthodox Christianity. Brunner gives a statement of what he considers to be the orthodox position: "While for living Christians the Bible always is the living present voice of God, orthodoxy has made the Bible an independent divine thing, which just as such, as a *corpus*

*mortuum*, is stamped with divine authority. The individual believer has to believe beforehand, has to accept it as an axiom that between these two black covers nothing but divine truth is stored up. Then he may open the book and obediently accept everything which is said here as a word of divine authority.”<sup>37</sup>

There is much justification in Brunner’s criticism. He has correctly described the view which many preachers have held of the Bible. Orthodoxy in Germany has doubtless laid itself open to such an attack. But the view to which Brunner is opposed has never prevailed within the Church. The great theologians have never held that the authority of the Bible was to be accepted in advance. They have held to the self-authenticating power of the Bible. They have held that, as men read it, it carries within itself the assurance of its divine authority. They have never held that this authority had to be accepted before men opened the pages of the Book. The position which Brunner attacks is a true statement of the interpretation which some thinkers have put on the doctrine of Scripture as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It would be little short of a caricature of the thought of Scripture which the men who wrote that great statement were seeking to express.

The Barthians and the Reformers and the creedal confessions of the Church all agree in that ultimately they rest the authority of Scripture on the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Barth writes: “It expresses obedience to the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*, to the spirit of God in which the human spirit of the writer and reader become

one in common adoration; and the truth of the statement stands or falls with the reality of this sovereign act proceeding from God and authenticated by him.<sup>38</sup> Calvin writes: "Let it be considered, then, as an undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason; but it obtains the credit it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit."<sup>39</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith says: "Yet notwithstanding our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts."<sup>40</sup>

The three groups agree that it is through the testimony of the Holy Spirit that man knows that he has heard the Word of God. The real disagreement comes when we ask just what the content of that testimony is. To the orthodox and to Calvin, the Holy Spirit affirms that the whole Bible is the Word of God. To the Barthians, infallibility is affirmed only of the message which the Holy Spirit brings home to the believer. Even here there is something of an agreement. The most conservative thinkers would agree that the Bible never actually becomes a Word of God to the believer until its truth has been opened to him by the voice of the Spirit in the heart. No objective standard can become vital until it has been *attested to me*.

The fundamental disagreement is concerning the nature of the written Word from which the Spirit speaks to the

heart of the believer. The Barthians ascribe authority only to the Word that is witnessed to in Scripture. Calvin goes further and holds to a very high doctrine of the nature of the written Word. He says: "But since we are not favored with daily oracles from heaven, and since it is only in the Scriptures that God has been pleased to preserve his truth in perpetual remembrance, it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they had heard the very words pronounced by God himself."<sup>41</sup> From this passage it becomes clear that while Calvin shares with the Barthians their emphasis on the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he goes beyond them in his thought of the authority of the Written Word.

Brunner claims that between the Barthian doctrine and the doctrine of the Reformation there is no real distinction. He claims that the orthodox position is not the Reformation position and that ultimately we must choose between them. After stating the Reformation position, he goes on to say: "Later on this Reformation view of the Bible was often confused with the orthodox view, *although in point of fact we have to choose between them*. . . . For Luther and Calvin, those living exegetes, it was clear that the Scriptures are human testimony to divine truth, and that therefore the authority of Scripture is not direct, but indirect."<sup>42</sup>

The last quotation asserts that for Luther and Calvin the Scriptures are merely human testimony to divine truth. We are quite willing to agree with this statement if it is interpreted to mean that Luther and Calvin recognize the impor-

tance of the human agents through which revelation has come to us. But, in the thought of Brunner, it carries deeper implications than this. Brunner assumes that because the Reformers think of Scripture as human testimony to divine truth it follows that both Luther and Calvin hold to very loose views as to the accuracy and the authority of the Written Word. But the conclusion is not necessarily involved in the premise. The simple fact is that an unbiased examination of the original works of Luther and Calvin does not show that they held loose views as to the nature and extent of the inspiration of the written Word. We have quoted a passage from Calvin which shows his opinion of the authority of the Written Word. Here is a passage from Luther which we will quote in full. "Wherefore let us learn to advance and extol the majesty and authority of God's Word. For it is no small trifle (as brain-sick heads at this time surmise), but *every tittle thereof is greater than heaven and earth*. Wherefore, in this respect, we have no regard of Christian charity or concord, but sit, as it were, on the judgment seat; that is to say, *we curse and condemn all men who in the least point to deface or corrupt the majesty of God's Word*: 'for a little leaven maketh sour the whole lump.' But if they leave us God's word entire and sound, we are not only ready to keep charity and peace with them, but we also offer ourselves to be their servants, and to do for them whatsoever we are able; if not, let them perish and be cast down to hell; and not only they, but even the whole world also, so that God and his true Word do remain." 43



The subject of the attitude of Luther and Calvin to the Bible is, of course, too vast to be dealt with in a chapter that is concerned primarily with the statement of the Barthian position. Fortunately the subject has been adequately dealt with in other places. In the issue of the *Union Seminary Review* for October, 1931, an article by Dr. J. A. Faulkner deals with Luther and the Bible, and an article by Dr. T. C. Johnson deals with Calvin and the Bible. Both articles give careful and impartial consideration to the facts, and both articles reach the conclusion that the assertions concerning the liberal tendencies of Luther and Calvin cannot be supported by the evidence.

One further word of comment that must be evident even on the basis of the most casual examination needs to be brought out. At best, the minor discrepancies which Luther and Calvin are reported to have found in Scripture belong to the periphery of Scripture. They deal with such things as an apparent discrepancy in numbers, a possible conflict between Paul and James, or an obvious mistake in the reference of a quotation to an Old Testament writer. The liberal contention on these points is not granted by conservative scholars, but even if it were granted, the liberal conclusion would not follow. Nothing vital is involved. There is no radical reconstruction of the whole narrative. All of the possible discrepancies in the Reformers are at the periphery of Scripture. We could admit them all and the integrity of the Word would not be seriously affected. The freedom in the attitude toward Scripture taken by liberal writers and by many members of the Barthian school is apt to strike at the

very heart of the message of the Bible. Between such an attitude and the attitude of the Reformers there is a chasm as deep as the sea.

Brunner is probably correct in drawing a distinction between the Reformation doctrine of Scripture and that view of Scripture which he describes as characteristic of orthodoxy in Germany. But we cannot fail to feel that the great Reformers are far closer to the conception set forth in the historic creeds of the Church than they are to the view which prevails among the more extreme members of the Barthian school. It is possible that the premises on which Barth and Brunner move may be found in the Reformers. But it is quite certain that they did not work them out to the conclusions that the Barthians have reached.

Why have the Barthians departed from the Reformers in this respect? What has forced them to their present position? Two reasons may be given to explain their attitude. The first is the philosophic assumption from which the Barthians start. Barth assumes the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. He makes this assumption central to his system. His thought of Scripture flows inevitably from this position. He could not be true to his original position and fail to make a distinction between the Word of God in its original form and the human witness to that Word. It may be true that the Barthian doctrine has proved the expedient solution to a difficult situation, but Barth has not taken it because of its expediency. The blight of pragmatism has never fallen on his soul. Barth and Brunner take this position because there is no other position

which they can take without doing violence to that assumption which is basic to all their thinking.

The second reason for the Barthian attitude flows from the historic position in which the Barthians found themselves. We need to remember that they write from Germany and that the Germany of pre-war days was the center of the radical criticism of the Bible. The world in which they moved was a different world from the world of the Reformers. When Luther and Calvin spoke for God to their generation, the doctrine of Scripture was not even in debate. It was assumed by both parties to the great controversy. Barth and Brunner faced in Germany a world that had ceased to believe in anything, and yet a world that needed desperately to believe in something. Criticism in Germany had done its destructive work. The people to whom they spoke in Germany had breathed its atmosphere until the foundations of faith seemed undermined. The need of the hour was for a doctrine which could admit the validity of criticism and at the same time call men to a high and worthy conception of the Word of God. The Barthian position was peculiarly adapted to this need.

Thus Brunner asserts that the Barthian conception lifts the Word of God to a plane on which it cannot seriously be affected by the results of historical criticism. He writes a strong paragraph in which he describes the results of the critical analysis of the Bible. He does not accept them all, but he does recognize that through the work of criticism men have been forced to take a different attitude toward the Bible. He goes on to say: "But if after all we quietly consider this

change of situation, the excited clamor of the attackers as well as of the defenders, more and more appears as a senseless panic. What then has been destroyed? We answer nothing of importance. Nothing except what had to be destroyed for the sake of faith, namely, the divine authority of what was really human. . . . If we hold fast to the truth that the Word of God is given to us only in human, questionable form, it is a matter of course that biblical criticism and Bible faith or Bible authority are not only reconcilable, but necessarily go together." 47

There is much of truth in Brunner's contention. But we do not feel that it contains the full truth. We are ready to admit that somehow there must be a reconciliation between a sound biblical criticism and a vital faith in the message of the Bible. The principle of the unity of truth demands this. We are prepared to go further and agree that the certainty of the believer rests ultimately on the power of the Spirit to authenticate the word in his heart. We do not believe that this certainty is necessarily tied up with his conviction concerning the accuracy of the biblical text as we have it today in matters of minor detail. But we do not believe that Christian faith can ever afford to surrender the integrity of the Scriptures on which it is based. We must continue to hold that we have an authentic record, a true witness to God's revelation of himself in history. If we are to continue to hold this, we must continue to believe that through the superintendence of the Spirit we have been given a Bible that is trustworthy. Conservative scholars are inclined to think that at least some of the Barthians have surrendered

far too much to the critics. They feel that the substantial accuracy of the Written Word is the bedrock on which faith must rest. They believe that it is still possible to assert that this foundation has not been destroyed by criticism. It is interesting to note that since the war criticism in Germany seems to be moving in this direction.

In another very important respect, the orthodox position of the authority of the Written Word is superior to the Barthian position. On Barthian premises, there is no way to prevent men from falling into a position which the Barthians themselves would abhor. The system would inevitably tend to a vast subjectivity in which each man decided for himself just what portion of Scripture had authority for him. Brunner would at once deny that this is true. He would assert that such a statement is a perversion of their teaching. But the fact remains that when we surrender the authority of the objective standard we leave the individual the judge of the portions of the Bible which he accepts as authoritative. And this is bound at the last to mean confusion and discord. On orthodox principles we do have an objective standard. It becomes the Word of God to the man who surrenders to it and hears its message. To others, to the spectators, it has no message. But its authority is objective. It rests on the fact that it is the Word of God. It does not depend on the subjective experience of the believer. In the principle of the recognition of the authority of the Written Word, the Barthian doctrine of the Word of God can find its deliverance from the danger of a vast subjectivity.

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## CHAPTER V

### JESUS—THE CHRIST

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“THE INCARNATION of God in Christ was nothing else than the incarnation of God in all men carried up to its superlative degree—to which superlative degree the incarnation of God in all men was also to be carried up at last.”<sup>1</sup> In these words Dr. Henry Clark, a liberal theologian, gives expression to the liberal reconstruction of Jesus. To Barth and Brunner this picture of the liberal Jesus deserves the anathema of the Church. They object to it because it starts from man and moves upward to God, because it obliterates the qualitative distinction between man and God, and because it has “nothing in common with the Jesus of the Bible save his name.”<sup>2</sup>

Both Barth and Brunner begin their thought of Jesus with the thought of a downward movement from God to man. Barth says: “I mean a movement from above, a movement from a third dimension, so to speak, which transcends and yet penetrates all these movements and gives them their inner meaning and motive; a movement which has neither its origin nor its aim in space, in time, or in the contingency of things, and yet is not a movement apart from others. I mean the movement of God in history or, otherwise expressed, the movement of God in consciousness, the move-

ment whose power and import are revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”<sup>3</sup>

Brunner gives a matchless picture in which he expresses the same thought: “We may express the essence of the history of mankind, and the place of these leaders, in the following picture: We see a huge marching army of men moving toward a far goal: salvation, God. This marching army has the form of a wedge—sharp-pointed in front and widening out backward almost to infinity. In front we see the leaders and heroes, the pioneers, the men of genius, the saints, the sages. They are far ahead of others, like a vanguard, and yet they are all connected; they form one army, one humanity, seeking the salvation which they all need. Among them, perhaps among those ahead, there are some whom they call prophets. These have no pre-eminent position, but with their finger they point to a spot above them all: Look there, listen there; there is the salvation you need! Not that they are that spot; what distinguishes the prophets from so many leaders is just this self-effacement. They know that it is no use to march in front, because the spot to which they point is not on the same plane as the human route of march. They know and say: You cannot reach it by marching; you cannot come to salvation, but salvation comes to you. And yet, although they see it coming, they cannot say: Here it is.

“And now this approaching point of light, to which they direct attention, touches the earth and comes to meet the marching army, and behold! it is a man. Not a man out of the army seeking salvation, but One who comes alone to

meet the marching army, to give what they seek. And now some recognize him; it is he who is what the prophets had said. He whom, perhaps, imperfectly and indistinctly, they saw coming. He is the Savior.”<sup>4</sup>

In another connection Brunner writes: “This is the Jesus of the New Testament, Jesus the Christ; it is him alone that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as John and Paul, report. To them he is no religious genius, but a Savior, no founder of a new religion, but one in whom God himself is present among men. He is the window through which we look into the world of God; he is the place at which we find the living God; he is the eternally contemporary Word of God present and alive today, the reality of God in the godless world.”<sup>5</sup>

Moving against the background of their conception of Jesus as the Messiah, as the Word made flesh, the Barthians make a frontal attack on the whole liberal reconstruction of Jesus. This attack in several of its phases needs to be presented. They attack the modern emphasis on Jesus as the teacher. There is grave danger of a misunderstanding of their meaning here, for neither Brunner nor Barth are always careful to qualify their assertions. When the Barthians attack the conception of Jesus as the teacher, they do not mean to say that there is no value in what Jesus taught. They would gladly admit that what Jesus taught is of great value to those who through the act of faith have seen in him the Word made flesh. The attack is against those who seek to find the real significance of Jesus in the study of the things that he taught. The attack is against those who seek to find the importance of Jesus in *what he taught* rather



than in *who he was*. Those who deny the full deity of Jesus have consistently tended to magnify his teachings. They have sought to show the marked contrast between what he taught and what men had taught before he came. Only by such a process can those who have denied his deity find in him that which is distinctive enough to account for his unique place in the religious life of the world. But the attempt is doomed to failure; for when the emphasis is placed on his teachings it inevitably follows that the emphasis ceases to be placed on him. Socrates was one of the three great teachers of the Greek race. Plato attributes to him the formulation of the argument for the immortality of the soul. Students of Greek philosophy are in debate as to whether or not Socrates was the man who first gave the argument. One group claims that the argument was worked out in the mind of Plato and was put in the mouth of Socrates merely as a literary device. Others claim that Socrates originated the argument and that Plato got it from Socrates. But after all the question is a purely academic one. The important thing is *the argument* not the *source* of the argument. It is a matter of interest as to *who* thought it first, but the essential thing is the *thought*. If Jesus is merely a great teacher, then he has no lasting importance. The *teachings* are the really significant things. This completely reverses the orthodox approach. In orthodox thought the teachings of Jesus are important because *he* taught them. From their thought of the Person of Christ orthodox scholars move out to the realization of the significance of his teachings. The Barthians are, therefore, thoroughly in harmony with ortho-

dox thought when they attack the modern attempt to find the significance of Jesus in his teachings.

From the same point of view the Barthians attack the modern emphasis on Jesus, the Example. Here again we need to guard against a misunderstanding. The Barthians do not deny that there is value for the believer in the study of the life of Jesus. Jesus was perfect man as well as fully God. While it is true that he revealed God to man, it is also true that he revealed man to man. The Barthian attack is against the attempt to find the significance of Jesus in the life that he as man lived among men. The objections to this attempt are many. Two important ones may be urged. First, it brings Jesus down to the plane of a man among men. He may be the best of men. He may tower over all the other men that have ever lived or ever will live. He may have lived a life that was free from sin. But after all his difference is a matter of quantity, not of quality. He remains a man among men. The second objection is that the attempt leaves us with an ideal, but without power to reach that ideal. The holding of the ideal before us is important. The realization of the imperative of its demands is essential. But after all, demands do not generate power. Jesus, the Ideal, may become our despair. He is not the Savior.

In the third place, the Barthians direct their attack against the distinction between the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith. Again we need to be careful to avoid misunderstanding. The attack on the "historic Jesus" does not mean that the Barthians deny that Jesus lived and moved in his

tory. They are attacking the liberal reconstruction of Jesus which has been presented under the battle cry, "Back to the Jesus of history." Liberal thought has decided that a distinction must be made between the Jesus who is presented in the New Testament and the Jesus of history. According to this method of approach the Jesus of history was the most wonderful personality that has ever come into history. He so impressed those who knew him that after his death they continued to magnify him until at last under the influence of Paul they ascribed to him deity. Thus Emil Ludwig writes a biography of Jesus. He writes of Jesus as he writes of Napoleon or of Lincoln. He eliminates the supernatural in the life of Jesus. He tries to present the figure that he feels must be the historic figure that lies behind the Figure of the New Testament. He closes his book with the story of the death of Jesus. As he does so he comments on the way that women loved him. In his closing sentence he says that two women who loved him deeply were the first to invent the story that rendered him immortal; i.e., the story of the resurrection from the dead.

Thus liberal theology has magnified the differences between the pictures of Jesus presented by Paul and John and the report of him given by the Synoptic writers. The Gospel narratives have been worked over, and a violent criticism has attempted to remove the passages which do not fit in with the liberal reconstruction of Jesus. We were promised that as the result of the process we would at last have a picture of the real Jesus, the Jesus of history.

But the attempt from the first has been doomed to failure.

It has never been able to explain the Jesus of the New Testament. The Jesus of the New Testament is a fact. Liberal theology has never been able to give an adequate account of the way in which the *Jesus of history* was transformed into the Jesus of the New Testament. Such a transformation would have involved a controversy compared to which Paul's controversy with the Judaizers would have been merely a tempest in a teapot. But the earliest records do not show a trace of such a controversy. The Person of Christ was assumed in the Church from the start. In the New Testament Church it was not even in debate.

The liberal reconstruction broke on the rock of Jesus testimony to himself. Even the most violent treatment of the New Testament could not finally get away from the testimony of Jesus as to who he was. The study of the messianic consciousness of Jesus showed that the liberal Jesus was left with a contradiction at the very heart of his being.

McConnachie gives a fine statement of the situation: "The most recent volume entitled, *The Historic Jesus*, by James Mackinnon, D.D., Emeritus Professor of Ecclesiastical History of Edinburgh, provides a good illustration. He writes as a historian of Jesus, as he has already written of Luther. He will give us the 'real Jesus.' The tragedy of the historic Jesus, he says, is 'that he was in advance of his age.' He was the greatest of utopians, but out of this divine Utopia 'was evolved the Church.' We cannot afford to ignore 'this arresting personality' in whom God reveals himself as in no other." <sup>6</sup>

McConnachie continues: "The obituary of this so-called 'historic Jesus' was written twenty-five years ago by A. Schweitzer, and no New Testament scholar in the first rank has since attempted to compose a life of the 'historic Jesus.' 'This Jesus,' said Schweitzer, 'never existed.' That verdict stands. The liberal picture of Jesus is forever destroyed." <sup>7</sup>

"It is not too much to say that while liberal theology has given us a Jesus of History who wins us by the beauty and wisdom of his words, and the large-hearted charity of his works, and the selfless devotion of his life and death, it has lost to us the God-Man, the second Person of the Trinity. The Christ whom Barth gives us is the Christ of Faith, the Christ of Paul and John, the Christ of Nicea, the God-Man." <sup>8</sup> In this last quotation McConnachie has summed up the Barthian criticism of "the historic Jesus" of modern theology.

We close this discussion of the Barthian attack on the "Jesus of liberal theology" with a passage from Barth himself: "The human nature of Christ is a creation of the Triune God, created and taken over for this, to be the vessel of the Revealer, the self-revealing Person of God, but still a creature and therefore not the Revealer himself. The 'Jesus of History,' without the content of the Divine essence; the 'Dearest Lord Jesus' of the mystic and the Pietist; the Teacher of Wisdom and Friend of Man of the Illumination, the Purport of the exalted humanity of Schleiermacher, etc.—is an empty throne without a king, the warm adoration of whom is a deifying of the creature and nothing else." <sup>8</sup> <sup>1</sup>

This brings us to a difficult phase of the Barthian thought

concerning Jesus. The Barthians teach that the revelation of God in Jesus, in order to be a true revelation, must be a veiled revelation that is accessible to faith and to faith alone. We will quote some passages from Brunner in which he presents this thought, and then proceed to examine its validity and value. "Thus the historical appearance of the human personality of Jesus is not, as such, revelation; it is revelation only in so far as in this historical, human personality the eternal Son of God is recognized. The Christ according to the Spirit who must be discerned in the Christ according to the flesh, the eternal Son of God who must be seen by faith as the mystery of the man Jesus, is the incarnate Word of God." <sup>9</sup>

' "... the contenders against the deity of Jesus as well as its defenders constantly overlook the fact that the revelation of God means that God became really man, that is, he veiled himself so completely that faith only can recognize in the man Jesus the Son of God. This the word of the Lord himself clearly indicates when he says, 'Verily flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.' " <sup>10</sup>

"To see the revelation of God in Christ is a gracious privilege of faith, of the believer and not of the historian; or metaphysically speaking, the organ with which Christ is apprehended is not the historian's scientific eye but the spiritual eye of the believer." <sup>11</sup>

The Barthians, therefore, teach that the revelation of God in Christ is a veiled revelation. It can be seen only by faith. In this they are thoroughly in harmony with the underlying principle of their thought. From the beginning they have

insisted that spiritual truths must be apprehended through faith and faith alone. They have closed forever the door of knowledge to those who seek to stand outside of the Christian system and try to understand it from the detached position of the spectator.

The position is plainly set forth in the prologue of John's Gospel: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, *and the world knew him not*. He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But *to as many as received him, to them* gave he the right to become children of God, *even to them that believe on his name*: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." <sup>12</sup>

It is significant that John inserts this passage so that it comes immediately before his great statement of the Incarnation. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." <sup>13</sup>

In the passages quoted John teaches the Incarnation of the Word, but he also teaches that the revelation was a veiled revelation. It was seen in its true significance only by those who "received him." This act of faith was a God-given thing. They were not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man. They were born of God. The Barthian position has never received a finer statement than that given to it by John.

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Jesus applies the same truth in his teaching to Nicodemus. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew

[margin—from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>14</sup>

Jesus brings out the same truth in his dealings with Simon Peter. Jesus asks the question of his disciples, “Who do men say that I the Son of man am?” The answers are various. Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elias. And others compare him to Jeremiah. Many affirm that he is a new prophet. All the answers have two things in common. They all testify to the impression that Jesus has made on them. He is unique. He is puzzling. He is more than an ordinary man. They cannot quite place him. At the same time all the answers testify to a failure to pierce behind the veil to an understanding of *who he was*. Jesus turns to the disciples, “But who say ye that I am?” And Simon Peter with a leap of faith pierces the veil as he answers: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To this Jesus replies: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.”<sup>15</sup> *BARTH 16:14→20*

Only a few of the contemporaries of Jesus who came into contact with the Man of Galilee were privileged to see behind the veil of flesh to the vision of the Son of God. Judas lived in close contact with him for three years, but he never learned to see with the eye of faith. The Scribes and the Pharisees had many chances to see him and hear him, but their eyes were never keen enough to see in him the Son of God.

Is not this what a revelation should be? Is it not the very essence of love to approach infinitely near, near enough



to be accessible to all those who truly seek, and yet to remain hidden until they seek. A revelation that was so open that it compelled faith would be certain to destroy the very nature of faith.

We are merely stating the other side of the same truth when we say that the Christ remains hidden to those who do not come to him in faith. To them he constitutes the *skandalon*, the stumblingblock, the offense, the great unknown. Men who have never surrendered to Christ and have never seen in him the Son of God are puzzled to explain Christ. They meet here something which is beyond them—something which they must explain and yet cannot explain. This truth applies to the whole life of Christ, but it is best seen in a study of the resurrection. In the resurrection life of Christ a manifestation of the world of God was given to the world of men. But the manifestation could not be seen by those who were not believers. Jesus had said to his disciples, "The world seeth me no more" . . . "but ye shall see me." Peter says, "Him God raised up the third day and shewed him openly: *not to all the people but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us*, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." <sup>16</sup> The risen Christ was never seen by those who were not followers of him.

But from this "inrush" of the world of God into the field of history great effects flowed that could easily be seen by those who were not believers. The Scribes and Pharisees were soon aware of the new power that had come into the Christian Church. The followers of Jesus had been transformed. The Scribes and Pharisees could see the results of

this manifestation, but they could not see the source of its power. They faced an effect in history with which they must deal. Two possible courses were open to them. They could accept the explanation of it given by the disciples and believe that Jesus rose from the dead. This would, of course, offer an adequate explanation for the effect with which they were forced to deal. But there was a great difficulty here. Such an acceptance could never be merely a matter of intellectual assent. They could not admit the resurrection of Jesus from the dead without becoming Christians. The acceptance of this involved an act of decision, an act of faith. It meant surrender to Jesus. This they were not willing to do.

The only other course was to deny the explanation given by the disciples and seek to explain the rise of the Christian Church on some other basis. But no other basis could be found that would adequately explain the rise of the Christian Church. Every attempt that was made to find such a basis ultimately broke down.

The Scribes and Pharisees were left, therefore, in a dilemma. They were facing a fact that they had to explain, and yet on their principles they could not explain it. Jesus had become to them the stumblingblock that he always has been and always will be to unbelief.

The Scribes and Pharisees could see the empty tomb. They could not see the Risen Lord. They were forced to deal with Christianity as a powerful movement in the life of the Jewish nation. They could not understand the source of its power. They had to account for Christianity. And

they could not account for it. They were in a dilemma. The only way out was the road of surrender, and they refused to take that road. In them we see an epitome of all unbelief as it stands baffled in the presence of Jesus, the God-man.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE WORD OF THE CROSS

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THE LAST CHAPTER has given a study of the general principles that underlie the Barthian thought of Christ. But it has left many questions unanswered. We have seen the Barthian polemic against the liberal reconstruction of Jesus, but we need to consider the picture of him which the Barthians present. A man's thought of the Person and Work of Christ is central to his whole theology. No presentation of the Barthian theology would be complete without some attempt to give their answers to the great questions that have been asked concerning Christ. A theologian interested in gaining an insight to the Barthian thought would be certain to ask questions such as the following: What do they think of the Trinity? Do they believe in the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation? Do they accept his full deity? How do they describe the human and divine natures? What doctrine of the atonement do they accept? Do they believe in the resurrection of the body?

These and similar questions must inevitably be asked. Unfortunately the material is not available for the giving of adequate answers to these questions. And even if the material were available in abundance, the task of dealing adequately with such questions would be the subject for a

book in itself. All that can be attempted here is to give a few insights. Straws show the direction of the wind, and a few well chosen passages may give us some idea of the directions in which the Barthian thought is moving. We shall attempt to give little more than a few vistas. But from these vistas the main outlines of their thought can be grasped. The filling in of the details must be left to the imagination of the reader.

### THE TRINITY

In contrast to most modern theologians Barth starts with the doctrine of the Trinity. The usual method of procedure is to start with a study of the Person of Christ. The recognition of the deity of Christ carries with it the necessity of working out the relation between Christ and God. The doctrine of the Trinity is offered as the solution of the problem which the Church faces as she seeks to preserve her faith in the deity of Christ and to combine it with her thought of the unity of God. But Barth does not move up to the Trinity. He starts with the Trinity and works downward. In so doing, he is in perfect harmony with the second of his organizing principles; i.e., his emphasis on theology as the result of a movement from God to man.

Barth says: "That God reveals himself as the Lord and that he is, therefore, as we have seen, the Revealer, the Revelation, and the One Revealed—that the One God in three such different manners reveals himself as the Lord. That is the hard paradox with which the recognition of his revelation begins."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say that the doctrine of

the Trinity is a truth with which a man has to begin even if he cannot understand it. It is God's place to speak. It is man's place to receive and obey.

"The Church," he says, "did not invent this doctrine of the Trinity. She found it in the testimony of Revelation which is the basis of the Church. Here she finds God as the Revealer, the Revealing One, and the Revealed One." <sup>2</sup>

Barth then professes his acceptance of the orthodox formula through which the Church has expressed her faith in the Trinity. He proceeds to ask five questions of the man who refuse to accept the formula. As the five questions are very pertinent and as through them Barth reveals more fully his own position, we quote at length from them.

"1. Whether as a thinker he has really put himself and is willing to continue to place himself on the foundation of the Church, on whose faith he is baptized, i.e., whether he accepts the 'simple' testimony of the Bible from Revelation and is really willing to think with this position as his point of departure?

"2. Whether he is clear with reference to the extent of that confession, the extent of that simple, Jesus, the Lord, and whether he sees what consequences with reference to God irresistibly flow from this fact of Revelation?

"3. Whether he is as much concerned to know the truth and the essentials of his Christian speaking and thinking, as the ancients, who formed this doctrine out of this necessity, or is he content with his semi-haze of indefinite notions which may be less true or less false?

"4. Whether he, if he does have this love for the truth,

will also not lack the dialectic courage to really pursue the matter to the point of accepting a possible final formula which exhausts this subject matter as well or as poorly as a human formula can?

"5. Whether in this case he really has anything better to present than the dogma of the Church?"<sup>3</sup>

### THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Barth gives a discussion of two modern attempts to explain Jesus. He says of them: "What these two contentions have in common is the understanding that the New Testament thesis of the deity of Christ is strictly speaking a question of a manner of speech—figuratively meant and figuratively to be understood—a question of a hyperbole, of a pious metaphor. The true meaning, as it claims, is, of course, that Christ is the highest manifestation of human life, or (and perhaps combined with that) he is the most impressive symbol of the presence of God in man."<sup>4</sup>

Barth holds that this idea is very far from the sentence, "God was the Logos." "He who reveals God," says Barth, "must be altogether God without deduction or limitation. No near-God can do this."<sup>5</sup>

He follows this with a paragraph in which he gives positive statement to his belief in the full deity of Christ. "On the absolute deity of Christ depends exclusively the sufficiency of the Reconciliation through him, and on this again depends the *sola fide*, and this is the thing about which one ought not to be mistaken. Because faith is related to Revelation, and because Revelation is not a second next to

God, but a second in God himself, i.e., the fulness of the Godhead in the Son, that is why one can and must say: *sola fide*—"God is entirely in his Revelation"—that is the meaning of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ." <sup>6</sup>

### THE INCARNATION

Barth's belief in the deity of Christ is balanced by an unquestioned acceptance of his full humanity. Of the Incarnation he writes: "The Revelation of God to man becomes possible from God's side in this way and in no other—namely, that God's Son or Word becomes man, and indeed man in exactly the same sense as we all are; i.e., to say flesh, the bearer of our contradiction to God and to ourselves." <sup>7</sup>

In a fine passage, Birch Hoyle sums up Barth's contention as to the necessity of holding both to the full deity and the full humanity of Christ: "The man in whom God's Word (as Person) discloses himself must be entirely man. A theophany not being man would not reveal God. Nor would a superman, an angel, a spirit, who might give a partial revelation of God, be intelligible. To meet man God must be entirely and really man and nothing else. And yet such is the paradox of revelation—God must be also entirely in his revelation. Hence the Son, as God, as the Word, becomes man. 'The Word became flesh' is even stronger than if the verse ran, 'became man.' Flesh is the name of Adam who stands under the curse of the Fall, in opposition to God and with himself, the fallen corrupted human nature, soon to be sanctified and to be redeemed." <sup>8</sup> If asked how



he combines the divine and the human Barth practically replies in the terms of the orthodox confessions. He would be in sympathy with the answer in the Shorter Catechism to the question: "Who is the Redeemer to God's elect?" "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being eternal Son of God, became man, and so was and continueth to be God and man *in two distinct natures and one person, forever.*"<sup>9</sup>

Brunner states his thought of the person of Christ: "It is the mystery of the Person of Jesus that in the *place* where we have sinful person he has, or rather is, the Divine Logos-person. For 'person' is just what one cannot have, but only be. Christ has indeed received human nature but not human person. He has indeed taken over the temptableness—the possibility of sin bound up with the historical personality—but not the 'person' corrupted by original sin; i.e., the necessity to fall into temptation."<sup>10</sup> "Jesus Christ took over human nature but not a human person: Jesus Christ was no human person."<sup>11</sup>

The passages which have been given are sufficient to show that in general the Barthians in their reconstruction of the Person of Christ are moving along lines that are substantially the same as those laid down by the ancient church and reaffirmed in the creative period of the Reformation. There is, however, some dispute concerning this Barthian reconstruction. Critics of Barth admit that he has reaffirmed the ancient formulas. They assert that he has really changed them by giving to them a meaning which they did not have in the thought of the ancient Church. They claim, for ex-

ample, that Barth has read into the doctrine of the Trinity his own peculiar ideas flowing from his emphasis on the transcendence of God. Thus Dr. Pauck says: "Consequently, he cannot possibly be in accord with the ancient fathers, even if he claims to think on the basis of their belief. In reality, he believes something else. It may be misleading to say that Barth substitutes for the ancient idea of salvation the idea of the recognition of the transcendence of God and that he puts the *brokenness*, the *infinite contradiction* in the place of sin. Inadequate as such a statement may be, it probably suggests in an accurate way what has taken place."<sup>12</sup>

Hoyle, however, is convinced that Barth is in true harmony with the ancient creeds. "The background of the view of God is the doctrine of the Trinity, as adumbrated in Scripture, fully drawn out in the creeds of one undivided Church. *These thinkers proceed along the customary lines, familiar to students of theology, and scarcely require elaboration here.*"<sup>13</sup>

McConnachie answers the charge made by both Hoyle<sup>14</sup> and Pauck that Barth makes the difference between God and man metaphysical rather than moral. He says: "He (Mr. Hoyle) finds that Barth confuses the differences between Creator and Creature, which is metaphysical, and that between God and the sinner, which is viewed ethically. There may have been some confusion in the earlier stages of Barth's thinking on this point, but he now makes it abundantly clear everywhere that the one thing which divides God and man is sin."<sup>15</sup> We might add that the preserving of

the metaphysical distinction is essential to the preserving of the moral distinction. When the barriers between Creator and Creature have been broken down, as they have been in modern theology, the sense of sin and guilt is apt to go with them.

We are ready to admit frankly that the final word on the Barthian reconstruction of Jesus has not been spoken yet and cannot be spoken until more adequate evidence is available for a study of it, but on the basis of the evidence which can be considered at present we believe that McConnachie and Birch Hoyle have (as usual) come nearer to an entering into the mind of Barth than his other critics have, and that in the main their contention can be sustained.

### THE DEATH OF CHRIST

The thought of the Church concerning the meaning of the death of Christ is very closely related to her thought of the Person of Christ. Barth himself states this: "On the perfect deity of Christ hinges the complete efficacy of the atonement effected by him, and on this in turn the *sola fide*, concerning which one ought not to allow himself to be deceived."<sup>16</sup>

At this point a criticism can be made of modernism. Modern theologians have found it difficult to combine the traditional thought of the meaning of the atonement with the modern reconstruction of the Person of Jesus. The *liberal Jesus* was not able to bear the weight of the world's sin. There has been, therefore, a constant tendency to get away from the thought of the atonement as a supreme sacrifice in which God himself makes expiation for the sins of the

world. Of course, modern theology has not failed to emphasize the meaning of the cross, but it has found it increasingly difficult to say just what that meaning is. The objective nature of the atonement has received little emphasis. The idea of a divine *deed* in which, by the suffering of God, sin was covered has almost dropped out of much of modern preaching.

In harmony with its principles modern thought has tended to start with man and to seek to explain the atonement by human analogies. The emphasis has been placed on the effect of the atonement of man. But modern theology has forgotten that that which is done for the effect ceases to have very much effect. On the basis of its own principles modern theology has found it very difficult to give an adequate account of the necessity of the atonement. Thus it has gradually lost the ability to give even a true statement of the effect of the atonement on man. With its emphasis on the kinship between God and Man, modern theology has sought to explain the sufferings of Christ as different in degree but not in kind from the sufferings of other good men as they walk the pathway of duty—cost what it may.

It is refreshing, therefore, to find that in the Barthian thought of the old ideas of the meaning of the cross, the ideas for which orthodoxy has consistently stood, are coming back. A full presentation of them cannot be given, but even a few quotations will show the chasm which separates the Barthians from much of the modern thought of the atonement.

In characteristic fashion, the Barthians employ their dialectic method in the attempt to get at the meaning of the

atonement. They approach it brokenly. They know that they cannot grasp its whole truth. They know, too, that its truth must often be expressed in seemingly contradictory statements. They speak in statements that have a synthesis which lies beyond the contradiction, but the synthesis cannot be expressed. Brunner says of our human attempts to give adequate expression to the meaning of the cross: "Every one of them is necessary and illumines the matter anew, but none for themselves alone are sufficient and adequate. All these expressions are radii of a circle which point to one center, yet without touching it. How can it be otherwise since what is the essence of all theology's assertions is, 'Radii toward a center, but in the midst, a gap'? God cannot be expressed." <sup>17</sup>

Brunner gives a strong paragraph in which he illustrates the seeming contradictions that are met in Christian thinking concerning the meaning of the cross: "This weight of guilt, this necessity of an objective act of reconciliation mankind first came to know, generally, in Christ. The gulf, the thing that lies between, became first clear in its magnitude by the occurrence of reconciliation, by the Cross. Answer and question, help and knowledge of need, are simultaneously in the revelation of Christ there in One. Only at the Cross does man know wholly what separates him from God: There he knows it as no more separating him. The paradox, the unity of opposites, which is characteristic of the Christian knowledge of God, is here perfect." <sup>18</sup>

Brunner brings back the idea of a divine expiation in which the sins of the world are dealt with and are covered.

" . . . . just this constitutes the mystery of divine revelation and reconciliation in the incarnate and crucified Christ. That God removes the contradiction by bearing it himself, this is the cross—*Agnus Dei qui tollit peccata mundi*. (The Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world)." <sup>19</sup> Thus, while admitting that it is a mystery, Brunner reasserts that which is at the heart of orthodox thought of the cross. He believes that God through his own suffering has borne the penalty for man's sin.

Barth testifies to the thought of the atonement as a finished work in which God has made the great sacrifice necessary to put away sin. His references to it are given, incidentally, in his discussions of other problems, but they are no less conclusive on that account. "*It has been done, the sacrifice is finished—our sacrifices can only be a witness to, a reflection, an echo of that great sacrifice that God out of his mercy has made for us!*" <sup>20</sup> ". . . in the midst of this world to know that the great sacrifice that had to be made for us has been made, that we are holy, righteous, pure through Jesus Christ." <sup>21</sup> "So be it—the wisdom of death, which consists in knowing that in the sacrifice of Christ the sacrifice demanded of us is made once and for all, that we ourselves are sacrificed with Christ, and that we therefore have no more sacrifices to bring; and just because it is the wisdom of death, it is at the same time the most comprehensive wisdom of life." <sup>22</sup> "In this world, there is no salvation and no certainty apart from the unique forgiveness of God, by which the sin of the pious and the not pious, the sin dis-

coverable in all life relations, the sin underlying the whole system of human ends, is covered." 23

These quotations from Barth could not have been written by a man whose thought moved against the background of the presuppositions of modern theology. They show a distinct return to the Reformation thought of the atonement.

In harmony with his own principles Barth makes an effort to make a positive contribution to the interpretation of the meaning of the death of Christ. In so doing he does not deny the other theories by which men seek to understand the meaning of the cross. He does make an independent contribution. To understand it we need to go back to Barth's fundamental thought of the infinite qualitative distinction between the world of God and the world of man. Barth's thought is that there is no real continuity between the two worlds. For one world to be born, it is necessary that the other world shall die. The affirmation of the world of God is possible only through the negation of the world of man. He gives a statement of his thought in his discussion of the meaning of Easter. "Behold I make all things new! *The affirmation of God, man, and the world given in the New Testament is based exclusively upon the possibility of a new order absolutely beyond human thought; and therefore as a prerequisite to that order, there must come a crisis that denies all human thought.*" 24

He continues: "*To understand the Yes as anything but the Yes contained in the No is not to understand it at all. Life comes from death! Death is the source of all.*" 25

In the Barthian thought death is the negation of life here

that the higher life may begin. From this point of view the death of Christ represents God's negation of everything that is this side of the dividing line between time and eternity, that the Yes which is on the other side may be spoken. To attempt to illustrate the thought here by earthborn analogies is, of course, to run the danger of misrepresenting it, but as we can only think with the things we know, we must make the attempt. In his *In Memoriam* Tennyson says "that men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." As we begin to think about it we realize that in the world around us the higher life can only come from the death of the lower. It is true in marriage. When a woman faces marriage she realizes that, in a certain sense, she must die to one life before another life can begin. She must surrender her own independence, her spending her own money as she pleases, etc. She must give up the whole world of "dates" with all that this means to a woman's heart. She must go deeper than this and cease to live for self and begin to live for another. Marriage is not true marriage until those who enter into it learn to live for each other. Beyond the world which she is surrendering there lies the world that she seeks. It is the world of existence in love, the world of a new home, the world of motherhood with all that it can mean to woman. The second world is possible only on the basis of the death of the first. She can rise to the second, but she must do it on the basis of a *dead self*. The inadequacy of the illustration lies in the fact that there is a strong continuity between the life before and after marriage. No negation is passed on the whole life. The negation is passed



on certain aspects of the life that conflict with the other life that is struggling to be born. The example does illustrate the Barthian thought of the emergence of life through death. It illustrates their thought of a *Yes* that is on the far side of a *No* and is possible only through the *No*. It illustrates their thought of the necessity of understanding the *No* on the basis of the light that falls from the *Yes* that lies on the far side of it.

The same principle is even more adequately illustrated in the field of religion. As the *Shorter Catechism* phrases it, we "are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness." <sup>26</sup> As a matter of fact, men cannot live unto righteousness until they die unto sin. In the life of the spirit men never rise until they rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves. The negation of sin is the prerequisite to the attainment of righteousness.

Against the background of these illustrations we turn again to consider the Barthian thought of the death of Christ. In the death of Christ God passes the final act of negation on all that lies on *This-side*. The word of affirmation is spoken through the resurrection which lies on the *Yon-side*. Dr. Pauck gives a fine statement of Barth's thought concerning the cross. "The end of the Messiah is the question: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This utterance cannot be explained away. It expresses the profound sense of being lost and abandoned, *derelictio*. It means the bearing of the sins of the world. In *this* sense the cross is the event in which in accordance with the belief in God of the Old Testament it becomes apparent that the only source for

the real, the immediate revelation of God is *death*.”<sup>27</sup> “The cross represents the end of all human possibilities, but beyond it lies a possibility which does not come from man, but which must overcome him: ‘Behold I make all things new.’ ”<sup>28</sup> The affirmation of the possibility is the appearance on earth of the resurrection life of Christ. The *Yes* lies on the far side of the *No*, but the *No* must be understood in the light that falls from the *Yes*.

Barth in his own inimitable way illustrates the truth by his reference to the famous Gruenwald painting of the crucifixion. Pointing to the copy of it that hangs in his study, he once said to a student, “I get most of my theology from that picture.”<sup>29</sup> The picture is painted on an old altar. The front of the altar is a door, and on the outside of this door the picture of the crucifixion is painted. A rude cross stands out against a background of darkness. The body of Christ has collapsed in death. Every detail of the picture indicates the agony of torture through which the body has passed before the final end has come. On one side of the cross there are two figures. They are Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and John the Apostle. Both stand in an attitude of dejection and despair. They have seen the *No*. They have not seen the *Yes* that lies beyond the *No*. On the other side of the cross John the Baptist is standing. He is a great unshaken figure. At his feet we see a lamb clasping a cross. The hand of John the Baptist is pointing in triumph to the figure on the cross. He has seen the *Yes* that lies beyond the *No*.

The real meaning of the illustration is seen when the door

is opened. We will let Barth describe the vision on the inside. “. . . to open the crucifixion scene literally, as doors are opened, and to show us on the back not only the gracious annunciation to Mary and the resurrection of Christ on the third day, but in the center, as a glimpse of the new world that waits behind the gruesome wall of death, the adoration of the new-born child by men on earth and by angels singing hosanna—with a vista beyond toward the glory of God the Father throned in limitless heights.”<sup>30</sup>

McConnachie sums up the message that Barth finds in the picture: “But it is the inward that explains the outward. Until we see the inward we stand before the outward dumb and uncomprehending. . . . The cross, the nails, the crown of thorns, the sorrows and the tears are but the outer door. Open the door, let the light of the world beyond, ‘the beyond that is within,’ shine through, and in that light we shall see light.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus in the thought of Barth the cross stands for the great negation passed by God on all life on the This-side. But it is not a negation without hope. The hope lies in the affirmation that lies on the Yon-side. The assurance of this affirmation is found in the resurrection of Christ. Because of this the believer can face the great negation that passes on all life here, the inevitable *death* that awaits every man, with a calm courage. He knows that after all it is merely the end of life that *Life* may begin.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE WORD OF GOD AND THE TASK OF THEOLOGY

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THE BARTHIANS set themselves squarely against the modern tendency to disparage theology. Barth says: "From the children's disease of being ashamed of theology I think I have some degree recovered. Some of you have had it, too, perhaps—and recovered." <sup>1</sup>

A stronger statement comes from Brunner: "Theologians of today are busy confirming the prejudice that theology is something unimportant and secondary, or even harmful to living religion. The modern slogan, 'Not doctrine but life, not dogma but practice,' is itself a doctrine, even a dogma, but it is not a Christian doctrine nor a Christian dogma. It is the dictum either of an ethical pragmatism or of mysticism. This attitude is characteristic of contemporary theology and religion." <sup>2</sup>

But the criticism runs deeper than a criticism of a lack of interest in theology in the modern world. Barth asserts that the real reason for this lack of interest is a breakdown in the content of theology. Men do not talk of theology for fear that they will reveal the real vacuum that lies in the thought of the Churches. ". . . the question of right doctrine cannot be opened up without the discovery and the acknowledgment of a great *perplexity* in modern Protestant-

ism. Perhaps it is the greatest of all perplexities. Our disparagement of 'doctrine' is the fox's disparagement of the grapes. *Had* we something more essential and authoritative to say, *had* we a theology convincing to, and accepted by, definite and increasing groups of people, *had* we a gospel which we *had* to preach, we should think differently."<sup>3</sup> In his Prolegomena Barth says: "Dogmatics is in a bankrupt condition because of the scarcity of the presuppositions with which we ourselves approach this work."<sup>4</sup>

The bankrupt condition of theology is to be traced, according to Barth, to the failure of theology to understand the nature of her task. He reminds us that theology means *Theos* and *Logos*—God and his Word. He asks us to remember that the task of the theologian is to give coherent systematic statement of the truth which he has received from the Word of God. Brunner says: "The science which is taught in most of our leading theological schools under the name of Christian theology ought rather to be called the science of religion. For the subject matter is not the Word of God, the revelation in Christ, but something totally different—religion, and perhaps revelation, in general. It seems very old-fashioned and unscientific to *take theology in its original sense as the methodical study of the meaning of the Word of God.*"

Barth never tires in his attempt to call theology back to the scriptural standard. Of the Reformed theologians he says: "They refer all doctrine away from itself to one Object. To them *truth* is God—not their *thought* about God, but God *himself* and God alone, as he speaks his own *word*

in Scripture and in Spirit. And if we are to take our Reformed churchmanship seriously, the reasons for it, be they never so convincing in themselves, must all lead up to this, which as revelation witnessed to and perceived in the Scriptures, is itself no idea, no principle, no doctrine, but the origin of all doctrine and the standard by which all doctrine is and forever must be measured.”<sup>6</sup>

We need to guard against a misunderstanding of the Barthian position and in doing so to bring out the real difference between the Barthian and the orthodox position. Orthodoxy, according to the Barthians, considers that the Bible is an objective standard which through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has been preserved from fallibility. Orthodoxy, therefore, considers that the task of theology is to interpret this standard. The task would not be essentially different from the task of a court which must determine the meaning of a constitution and see that the various interpretations of its meaning are not contradictory. When Barth refers all doctrine back to its origin, he means something very different from this. In his thought the Word of God is the revelation of God in Christ. Scripture is the written record of the testimony to this Word. *The Living Center*, the Origin to which all doctrine is referred, is *God speaking to us in and through his Word*.

Theology is the word which man must speak after the Word of God has spoken to him. Barth says: “Essentially it would serve not so much to produce a correct formula or a doctrinal system as to let a man know that there is a necessity upon him, a necessity for saying in human terms,

both general and particular, what is first said to him in divine terms.”<sup>7</sup>

In a famous passage Barth expresses his own faith as he gives a description of the Reformation principle of conformity to the Scripture. “At their very beginnings the Reform Churches saw that truth is contained in the Word of God, that the Word of God for them lay in the Old and New Testaments, and that every doctrine must, therefore, be measured against an unchangeable and impassible standard discoverable in the Scriptures. What one may be moved to say concerning God, the world, and man, because he must say it, having let the Scriptures speak to him—the Scriptures themselves and not the Scriptures interpreted by any particular tradition; the whole Scriptures, and not a part of them chosen to suit a preconceived theory; the Scriptures and not the utterances of pious men of the past or present which might be confused with them; the Scriptures and not without the significant word of the Spirit which sustains them—what, after those Scriptures have spoken to him, one may be moved to say in fear and trembling concerning the things about which man of himself may say nothing or foolishness, *that*, if we may judge from our beginnings, is Reformed doctrine. *Doctrina* is the word of the Christian man at the crisis with the word of God: it is penetrated by that merciless purifying and cleansing which is witnessed to in the Scriptures. It remains the word of man. It does not become the *verbum divinum*, but in this relation it is none the less a legitimate and pure *praedicatio verbi divini*.”<sup>8</sup>

Barth considers that the failure of the Church to hold to

this *scriptural principle* is the real cause of the breakdown of modern theology. Theology has lost the *Living Center*, God is speaking. "As a result the great misery of Protestantism began: doctrine parted from its life-giving origin, hardened into *Orthodoxy*; Christian experience, confusing itself with this origin, took refuge in *Pietism*; truth no longer understood and no longer understandable, shriveled into the moral and sentimental maxims of the *Enlightenment*; and finally even Christian experience was reduced in Schleiermacher and his followers, both of the left wing and the right, to the hypothesis of being the highest expression of a religious instinct common to all men. These are the four corner stones of the prison in which we all (I say it advisedly, we all) are living. Some of us are nearer to this corner, other to that: 'Every man may choose his own hero!' Whether we are aware of it or not, the roof which is supported by these four pillars, which unites them to each other, and which shuts off from us, the inmates, the sight of heaven, is their denial of revelation." <sup>9</sup>

The real importance of Barth's position can be seen as we consider it in relation to the conceptions of the task of theology which prevail among modern theologians. Schleiermacher says: "In our exposition, all doctrines properly so called must be extracted from the Christian religious self-consciousness; i.e., the inward experience of Christian people." <sup>10</sup>

Another theologian writes: "The conviction that *religious experience is to be taken as the starting point of theological reconstruction* does not imply that we are resolved from the



labor of thought.”<sup>11</sup> Without concerning ourselves with the positive statement of this sentence we notice that it starts with the conviction that religious experience is to be taken as the starting point of all theological reconstruction.

Dr. Brown, of Union Theological Seminary, New York, gives a more conservative statement of the task of theology. He says: “Christian theology—is that branch of theological science which claims to give systematic expression to the doctrines of the Christian faith. These doctrines have been variously defined. In what follows we shall understand by them the abiding conviction about God, man, and their relations, growing out of God’s historic revelation in Christ, and *verifying themselves progressively in Christian experience.*”<sup>12</sup>

We see here an attempt to combine both methods. There is reference to revelation, but the ultimate test is still placed in Christian experience. Dr. Knudson defines the task of theology: “Theology may be defined as the systematic exposition and the *rational justification* of the intellectual content of religion.”<sup>13</sup> “Theology has its roots in the objective reference of religious experience.”<sup>14</sup>

Barth thus sets himself against the whole tendency of modern theology and calls in question its fundamental presuppositions. Dr. Pauck describes his thought: “He believes that from its own premises one can do no other than finally agree with Fierbach when he asserts that modern theology is tending toward the apotheosis of man. He is, of course, sure that the theologians do not mean it so, but he is certain that only that can be the end of the road. It is

highly interesting to note that certain American preachers have frankly professed opinions which are essentially the same as Fuerbach's." 15

Barth himself writes: "The theology of the first half of the nineteenth century instructed the Christian preacher that man is in a position to seek, find, and possess the truth of God in his own Christian consciousness, or in history, so that he, the preacher, might say not what had been told to him, but what he might, could, and should tell of himself. That is what was called the word of God, at that time." 16

Barth has no patience with an experience-centered theology. He says that this turns a man's attentions in on himself instead of bidding him to humble himself and to listen for the Word of God. "The real greatness of the fathers lay in their ability to see the gate definitely shut against all human greatness, and especially their own. It lay in that freedom from self-concern which made their creeds not expositions of their own inner experience, remarkable as that was, but something quite different: *testificationes conceptae intus fidei*." 17

A fine summary of Barth's criticism of the whole course of modern theology is given by McConnachie: "The root failure of this theology, according to Barth, is that men have gone forth from man and his measurements, and from them have looked at God, as if man was in his right of existence the fixed quantity and God the doubtful  $x$ , instead of looking from God, or rather from the Word of God, at man. They have imagined that they made great religious progress

by a direct speaking about God, whereas they have remained speaking about men, even if about good men.”<sup>18</sup>

The Barthian criticism of modern theology flows in the last analysis from the first two of the fundamental principles which determine all that is distinctive in the Barthian thought. It flows from the Barthian recognition of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. God is not man, and one cannot speak of God by speaking of man in a loud voice. And it flows from the Barthian emphasis on the movement *from God to man*. Man cannot speak of God. He must wait and let God speak of himself. Theology must be man's attempt to give expression to that which God has said to him.

To what extent does Barth ascribe finally to theology? He distinguishes between *dogma* and *dogmatics*. He distinguishes them by saying that *dogma* is truth only as recognized by God, and that *dogmatics* is the human inquiry after this truth. Finality belongs to dogma, but not to dogmatics. “Dogmatics,” he says “as all genuine science, is not a summary of results but an act of inquiry for which even the most certain results are interesting only as presumptions for new acts of inquiry. Dogmatics is human work. It shares in the restlessness, the incompleteness, and the transitoriness of all work of the human mind.”<sup>19</sup>

This distinction with its relation to the scriptural principle as set forth by Barth prevents him from attempting to express the Christian faith in definite creeds that shall be final and authoritative. He says: “Our fathers had good reason for leaving us no Augsburg Confession, authentically

interpreting the word of God, no Formula of Concord, no 'Symbolic Books' which might later, like the Lutheran, come to possess an odor of sanctity. They left us only *creeds*, more than one of which begin or end with a proviso which leaves them open to being improved on in the future. The Reformed Churches simply do not know the word *dogma* in its rigid hierarchial sense. In those Churches Christian history has no doctrinal authority whatever; the authority lies rather in the Scriptures and in the Spirit, both of which (even the Scriptures!) are beyond Christian history." 20

Barth does not object to the creeds. He does object to the exaltation of them to a position of finality and the use of them as a rigid test of orthodoxy. Brunner makes an interesting comment: "Let me interject a personal confession: I never believed in a creed of the Church, and I hope never to do so in the future. I believe in the Word of God, and nothing besides, for I do not wish to commit idolatry. And yet I am sure that the creeds are useful and venerable expressions of belief in God's Word. They are not *objects*, they are *expressions* of faith." 21 The last sentence gives the real essence of the Barthian position. The creeds are *expressions* of faith. They are not to be exalted into the position of *objects* of faith.

Barth would save us from a loyalty to the past that might conflict with our loyalty to the *Living Center* which is the *Origin* of all truth. "To our fathers the historical past was something which called not for loving and devoted admiration, but for careful and critical scrutiny. They cherished

the conservative principle, it is true, but with them it was so often broken and crossed by the opposite one that their beginnings at best show only a fragmentary loyalty toward the past, and for the most part represent a clean and merciless break with it." 22

Barth would, therefore, urge a loyalty to the past that is similar to the loyalty of the great Reformers. They went back to the past. They knew the past and loved it. They gathered from it that which seemed best to them and they used it in the construction of their systems. But their loyalty to the scriptural principle, God is speaking, went far deeper than their loyalty to the past. The Reformers did not fear to break with the past when they did so under the compulsion of their understanding of the *Deus dixit*.

Barth is even willing to attempt to construct a new creed through which the men of today can confess their faith, but he is certain that the time is not ripe for it yet. Our age has been too shallow and uncreative in theology to be able to produce a great creed. We must have a faith that we *have* to express before we can produce a creed that expresses it. "Perhaps—though it is farthest from my thoughts to ask for this today—it would be an agreement upon a creed which should be Reformed but also plainly and explicitly *new, speaking in our own language out of our own experiences to our own times*. But first our Churches must certainly be far wider awake to the question as to what is presupposed by a Christian creed." 23

This emphasis on the transitory nature of dogmatics can easily be perverted into something which is not at all the

Barthian thought. *Dogma* is final and authoritative. Dogmatics is transitory. The transitory nature belongs merely to the act of human inquiry. That which it inquires after is fixed and final, even if it cannot be perfectly apprehended. Modern thought has exalted the quest for truth into an end in itself. The final absurdity of this was shown when a great institution called a man who was an atheist to hold the chair of Comparative Religions. The presupposition was that he who had no faith could best understand all faiths. Barth has no sympathy with such a procedure. He believes in the final authority of the Word of God, but he is ready to confess that men ought never to be sure that they have perfectly caught the meaning of the Word of God and expressed it in their systems.

This attitude is the attitude of the New Testament. The New Testament thinks of truth as having come through a transcendent act of God. Man's place is not so much to seek truth as it is to witness to *truth* that has been given. Brunner reminds us that the New Testament illustration is that of a *herald*. The *herald* of the king is far removed from the "*seeker for truth*." The *herald* has the message of the king. It has been given to him by the king and his place is to speak to others that which the king has told him to speak. The Christian Church must never forget that she has been called into being by a transcendent act of God. The apostles would never have described themselves as seekers after truth. They were the witnesses of a resurrection. The Church has inherited their task. The Christian Church never shows to poorer advantage than when she forgets that she is called

into being by the revelation of God spoken in Jesus Christ and that her task is to witness to this transcendental reality. She denies her very nature when she falls into the relativism of all modern thought and becomes merely a *seeker*, a seeker with no message to proclaim.

The truth that came through Christ is final. Our apprehension of it may be faulty. We may find that as the ages go by God will open to us more fully the meaning of the Word spoken then. Under the guidance of Scripture and Spirit the Church may be able in the future to give finer expression to the meaning of her truth than she has been able to do in the past. But the changes if they come are not to be a going *beyond Christ*. They must flow from a loyalty to the great principle on which the Church is built: God speaking to us through his Word and authenticating the message by the testimony of his Spirit in the heart. All changes that do not flow from this center represent not a deeper insight into the truth of the message of the Church, but an abdication of that message.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WORD OF GOD AND ETHICS

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THERE HAS BEEN a persistent feeling that the Barthian theology could not produce the basis for a satisfactory system of ethics. The ground of this feeling is the thought that ethics is undercut by any system that places too much emphasis on the activity of God. Men feel that when God is preached as absolutely sovereign it must inevitably follow that men will feel that endeavor is useless. Men feel that when forgiveness is thought of as a divine act flowing from the mercy of God and not dependent on the condition of man the result will be disastrous to morals. Men feel that to preach that God covers sin in the atonement and declares the sinner righteous while he is still in sin must inevitably prove a dangerous procedure. They fear that as the result of such preaching men will think that they can continue in sin without having its penalty imputed to them.

In the face of all such criticisms the Barthians have the courage to assert that the doctrine of justification by faith is the only possible basis on which a true system of ethics can be built. Brunner replies to those who assert that the Barthians have no basis for their ethics: "The question is asked because men suspect that faith in the word of God, or in Jesus Christ and his redemptive work, is not an ade-



quate motive for Christian ethics. Such a suspicion rests on a grave misunderstanding. It is the error with which Paul had to contend and which was ground of the opposition of the Roman Catholics to Luther and Calvin. This misunderstanding is based on the erroneous supposition that when one regards all good work as God's and not his own he will not feel any responsibility to put forth effort of his own. To controvert this misunderstanding I submit again my own thesis: the *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solī deo gloria* of the Christian faith, that is, the Pauline view of faith, is the only solid foundation for ethics; and faith in redemption through Christ is the only real source of that ethical renewal and energy to which Paul refers when he speaks about the new creation in Christ. There is no other actual goodness of will than that which is the fruit of faith in justification by grace alone. I shall explain and seek to prove this thesis in the following discourse." <sup>1</sup>

Barth restates the ethical problem. He writes out of the background of life in Germany in the terrible years following the war when the shams of life were torn away and men ceased to find peace in the easy optimism of the prosperous days before the war. "There was a time," he says, "when with Kant or, let us say, with the cheerful Fichte, people took the ethical problem to be the expression and witness of the peculiar dignity and greatness of man. They were not disturbed and embarrassed but felt an exaltation and delight when their thoughts led them from things as they are to things as they ought to be, from facts to norms, from nature to history. Here was the absolute distinction between

man and the animals, not to say between civilized man and the savages." <sup>2</sup>

The breakdown of European civilization has brought with it a very different attitude toward the ethical problem. The situation may be compared to that found in Old Testament times when the Israelites found themselves beaten down and oppressed by their enemies. To them to suffer is to suffer because of God. They feel that God is against them, and that it is because of their iniquities that judgment has come upon them. Under such conditions the ethical problem changes its nature. It is no longer a question of the cheerful recognition of norms or goals to strive for. It is no longer a seeking to be more Christlike without much hope of attaining very much progress. When taken seriously the ethical question involves the realization that God is opposed to us as we are. Man no longer stands in the easy relation of the seeker for moral norms. He stands in the critical relation of a sinful man who must face the opposition of God to him. God has turned his face from him. The wrath of God is poured out on him. The all-important question becomes the question of a right relation to God. Thus Barth writes: "I say that the problem of ethics is a responsibility that cannot be borne; a deadly aggression against man." <sup>3</sup> Brunner and Barth deal with the ethical question as men who look out on a civilization that is unrighteous and look up to a righteous God. When men do this the ethical question is taken in earnest.

The thought here is so important that we need to consider a few more passages in which Barth expresses it.

"The era of the *old* ethics is *gone forever*. Whoever now desires *certainly* must first of all become *uncertain*. And whoever desires to speak must first of all be silent. For something *has* happened. . . . It is simply that over against man's confidence and belief in himself there has been written in huge proportions and with utmost clearness a *mene, mene, tekel*." <sup>4</sup>

A few years ago this stern facing of reality that pervades the thought of Barth would not have found any strong re-echo in the life of America. For America was in the period of her greatest prosperity. She had managed to bring the world into economic tribute to herself. The depression in the world outside of America had not been felt in America. Conditions today are very different. The breakdown in the economic life of the nation is typical of the feeling that our civilization is breaking along all lines. The belief in the easy optimism which went with increasing prosperity, when every man had unbounded hope in the future of the country, has given way to a very different mood. America, too, is beginning to feel that the *mene, mene, tekel* has been written over her civilization.

Against this background Barth sums up his conviction that man does not have the ability to solve the ethical question in his own strength. "Man cannot begin to answer the ethical question in actual life. He can only continue to recognize that he is wholly incapable of answering it. The conception of the moral objective offers us only a sense of what the Bible describes as the fall of man, which precedes and determines all history." <sup>5</sup>

True to his fundamental principle of moving from God to man, Barth starts with the divine act of justification by faith and builds his ethics on the consequences which flow from this. McConnachie says that he may be regarded as the first theologian who has taken up the task envisaged by the Reformers and sought to carry it out according to their mind and intention. He says, "The new thing in Christianity, therefore, according to Barth, is the righteousness which the believer has in Christ as his starting point and not as the goal of a long journey."<sup>6</sup>

But it is to Brunner that we must turn for a careful working out of the implications of this position. For this statement of Brunner's thought we are indebted to Birch Hoyle's translations of portions from *The Mediator*. The argument must be presented in full:

1. Brunner says that only in the Mediator do men ever know what they really are. "Men out of Christ, non-Christians as ethicists, are in two classes: cynical determinists or enthusiastic ideologues, realists or idealists. The realist sees the inherited sins and the curse of original sin, but not sins as such or the curse. The idealist sees freedom and the original, the idea of man, but not that this freedom and this origin are lost. Human ethics are impossible to both, for one removes responsibility and freedom, the other guilt and entanglement."<sup>7</sup> The thought of Brunner seems to be that both realists and idealists are certain to fail in their ethics because neither of them take into consideration the whole of the facts of life. Idealism overlooks the state of man as he is. Realism ignores responsi-

bility and freedom. The Christian view transcends them in that it recognizes both the ideal and the reality.

2. "Only in the Mediator does the will of God, therefore, the good, become known as love." All theories that build ethics on the basis of pleasure or well-being break, according to Brunner, on the fact that they cannot reveal the good as love. They have never been able to work out the synthesis of desire and duty. They set the goal, but have no power to make man want it. In Christianity the essential thing is the revealing of the love of God in Christ. Man responds to that love and in the response of love to love the synthesis of duty and desire is reached. Even in human relations we know that we have reached the highest only when through the compulsion of love we do what we ought to do because we love to do it.

3. "Man sees, first in Christ, his neighbor, and loves him." "Love sends us into the world: it is worldly, concrete, going to the neighbor in need, not as a case." This is an echo of the word of Christ, "As my Father has sent me into the world, even so send I you into the world." The man who is laid hold of by his neighbor's need is apt to be the man who is "in Christ" and therefore sees his neighbor through this new relation. It is a simple fact that social service fails unless it is rooted in the relation to God to which men come through Christ.

4. "First in Christ is man's own will broken in all its pride and God's honored. From autonomy one passes to theonomy."<sup>10</sup> The meaning here is as clear as it is important. At the heart of the Christian life there lies the act of

surrender, in which a man in response to the call of God gives up his own will and makes the will of Christ central to his life. The essence of sin is self-will. In the act of faith man surrenders his will and the will of God becomes his will. As the good is identical with the will of God this inevitably puts a man in a different relation to the good. As Brunner phrases it: "The bad says: *my* kingdom come, *my* name be honored, *my* will be done. The good says: Thy will be done, etc. A third does not exist." <sup>11</sup>

5. "First in the belief in justification the Good becomes, from a postulate, a reality." <sup>12</sup>

This is what Barth means when he says that in Christianity man moves out from the good instead of moving toward the Good. In justification man is declared righteous by an act of God. He is then set in the midst of this evil world and told to bear himself within it as the man whom God has claimed for himself should live. It is the good man that does the good works and not the good works that make the good man. The moral quality of the act is determined by the source from which it comes. "It is no longer a 'should-be ethics,' but 'is' ethics, and its characteristic is not forward but backward, not the whither but the whence. It is good done not out of slavishness, but from free will; it is that of the child done from love.

6. "Simply and alone, through Christ believed in, does man acquire a real ethical relation to historical reality." <sup>14</sup> Brunner distinguishes two possible attitudes toward history which are distinct from the Christian. The first is the idealist. The idealist builds his Utopia, but like all Utopias

it comes to grief on the hard rock of reality. He has dreamed things as they ought to be instead of facing them as they are. The other is that of pessimism which gives up all hope of a better world. "Christian faith knows neither this pessimism nor this optimism."<sup>15</sup> In contrast to optimism it knows of sin and judgment. But in contrast to pessimism it knows of the Kingdom of God. Even the negation of this life is for it little more than the preparation for the great affirmation of life that God makes in the Kingdom of God.

Brunner's conclusion on the basis of the argument which has just been presented is that a true foundation for ethics is to be found in the Reformation doctrine of justification. This doctrine does not undercut ethics. Instead it is the only foundation on which an enduring system of ethics can be built.

Barth deals with the whole matter in popular form in a little pamphlet called *The Christian Life*. The pamphlet is printed from a shorthand report of two addresses given by Barth to student groups in Germany. It shows him speaking in a popular style that does not fail to bring home his central thoughts concerning the nature of the Christian life. The addresses are based on Romans 12: 1, 2, and in part they presuppose the great theological argument that has gone before these verses. Barth reminds us that in one sense of the word the Christian life is the life that has been lived for us by Christ. Here is a fine passage: "I am regarded and acknowledged by God, yes, infinitely far from him as I am. Not as a second God but as man who has

sinned, is sinning, and will sin, and who can recognize himself as nothing else than lost, I am acknowledged by God in Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, acknowledged, chosen, and, when the fulness of time was come, reconciled to him. In him, the Son of God, we have peace with God. He did all that was needful for me, and he appears for me before the eternal God, before whom as man I am dust and as sinner am fallen to eternal perdition. Through his Son God speaks for me with himself. He is my advocate even with him—that is his life for me, that is the Christian life that Christ lives, has lived, and will live to all eternity. That he lives as the Mediator between God and man, my Savior, that is my Christian life!”<sup>16</sup>

When we read a passage like the one just given, we begin to realize the vast chasm which yawns between the theology of the Reformation and modern theology. Calvin could have written it or Luther, but it breathes a spirit that is foreign to the whole nature of modern theology. Brunner has a passage that is close to it: “To have part in the divine life of Jesus Christ by faith, to stand in the midst of history and to be comprehended in eternal salvation through the reconciliation made in him who is called the Life and the Way to Life—this is to be a Christian—to have life eternal.”<sup>17</sup>

Both Barth and Brunner are fully aware that the problem of the Christian Life is not answered by statements such as these. Man is not yet in the world of eternity. He is forced to live in the world as it is with all its imperfections. What they do contend for is that the Christian



life in this world shall flow out of the consciousness of standing in a relation to God which has been procured for us by Jesus Christ. The consciousness of this must be the factor that determines the Christian's way of living. The realization of this does not prevent our facing life here in its stern realities. Barth says: "The Apostle Paul, however, did not speak to the perfect and the redeemed, but to the reconciled, to men who have heard the word of faith but who, dwelling in this state, have not yet taken down the tent, who still await the habitation which is in heaven. This is the situation in which we are also!" <sup>18</sup>

The Christian must not forget that he is still in this world and that the liberty in which there is no difference between his activity and the activity of God is something which the Christian does not have. "We see: therefore before us is God's great eternal activity. And then we see as something totally different—another thing altogether, because God is true—the demand, the question about the Christian life that *we* have got to live." <sup>19</sup>

For an illustration of the nature of the Christian life Barth turns to the Old Testament thought of sacrifice. As he comments on the words "present your bodies a living sacrifice," he develops this thought. According to Barth the sacrifice in the Old Testament was offered as a substitute for what a man would like to do but cannot do. By surrendering the best of his herd the man testifies that he is in earnest. God accepts his sacrifice. Not that God needs it, but that he needs to offer it. "We can make sacrifices, but only on the understanding that God is pleased to accept

our sacrifice as a testimony that we have heard God. No boasting can ever enter into our sacrifice, no sense of assurance, no thought that we have escaped the need of mercy. Sacrifice it remains, and only sacrifice. But this sacrifice is demanded of us. God wants it. . . . Not because he needs it or because I am necessary to him, but because he is pleased to accept my sacrifice—for that reason I ought to do it and may do it.”<sup>20</sup>

The Christian life, therefore, is a sacrifice that man the Christian presents to God in token that he has heard his call. A possible misunderstanding is involved here that needs to be cleared up. Barth is concerned at all costs to shut out any idea that presents God as depending on man. In so doing he is rightly protesting against a tendency in modern preaching. Many a missionary address, in its attempt to arouse the Church to action, has practically presented such a view of God. Men are told that God is depending on them; that if they fail the purposes of God will fail. Men are practically put on the plane of equality with God. They are told that God has done a great deal for them and that now it is up to them to *do something for God*. Barth refers to Zinzendorf’s saying, “That I did for thee, what wilt thou do for Me?” He adds: “I am not going to attack that expression in its proper signification. But it must be clearly understood that the two sides in the relationship are not on an equality. First of all, there can be no thought of our doing anything ‘for God.’”<sup>21</sup>

The thought which Barth is presenting here has received classic expression in the hands of Milton:

“God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts.  
Who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.  
His state  
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o’er land and ocean without rest.  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”<sup>22</sup>

In harmony with this Barth presents the Christian response to God simply as a *sacrifice*, as a *token* that we have heard. In tender words he phrases it: “I have understood what you mean. I am glad that you are fond of me. I feel myself under an obligation to you, and now, as far as I can, I will show it.” This is the language of the Christian as he answers the call of God. Barth continues: “That cannot mean doing something divine—for it is something infinite that God has done for us. We can only give a token: I have understood, heard, and want to stand to thee in this way because thou lovest me.”<sup>23</sup>

Even with human love is not this always the response of love to love? A woman gives her love to a man. If the man who has received the gift of the love of a true woman is very much of a man, he knows full well that he cannot give back something that balances that which he has received. All that he can give is a token that he has heard and has understood. He has ceased to move on the plane of the response of love to love when he begins to talk of doing something in return for that which she has given to him. And if this be true in the relation of man and woman, is it not infinitely more so in the relation of man to God? Man

and woman do stand on something of the same plane. Man and God do not.

There is a danger lest this emphasis should destroy the New Testament thought of man as a laborer "together with God." In the New Testament man in the infinite mercy of God is given the high privilege of in some measure sharing with God the great task of bringing the world under the dominion of God. But this thought is not in real contradiction to the thought of Barth. Brunner gives expression to the other side: "This quiet and peace, this having and being, however, is not that of the mystic who passively enjoys heaven upon earth. It is rather the call of the Lord of hosts who is constantly recruiting men for his army, the *ecclesia militans*. He who has taken the inner fortress of your soul; i.e., your ego, will not stop there, but will take you with him to conquer the world."<sup>24</sup>

Barth is concerned, too, to prevent the confusion of the form of this world with the form of the world of God. The doom of guilt hangs over all that man does in this world and the very best that he does partakes of it. We must not confuse man's nothing perfect with God's all complete. The thought may be illustrated by the example of an old elder who used always to close his prayers with the petition that God would forgive them for the sins committed in the act of worship. All that man has, even his best, partakes of the nature of that which is transitory and guilty. Thus Barth writes: "The thread by which my life is connected with God becomes, from the human point of view, thinner and thinner. There is no progress but in-

creasing retrogression. We see ourselves more and more helpless, we learn to know ourselves better and better, become more and more afraid of ourselves, observe what kind of sighing our faith is, what kind of stammering our speech is, what kind of tottering, like that of a little child, our so-called Christian life!" This might seem too pessimistic if it were not combined with another statement: "If we do not live our life exhorted by the mercy of God, we might well be driven to despair. But we are not driven to despair. Here is the wonderful power of the Christian faith, and the wonderful mainstay of our Christian life—the word of the eternal mercy that follows us: that while we decrease, by the mercy of God *our inward man increases*." <sup>25</sup>

Barth declares that even converted Christians are and remain "beings who exist in this world, and who, in all that they do and are, wear the form of this aeon. And their finest and most earnest and ever so well-meant accomplishments will always bear the stamp of an act of this great vital impulse. Nothing is simpler than to bring Christian religious impulses, even the highest and most intimate, to this biological denominator, and to understand them as a life activity alongside of others, and equally questionable. Guilt and transitoriness are the main characteristics of even our best deeds." <sup>26</sup>

The Christian life is the life of the man who has been laid hold of by God and who in the midst of time is called to bear witness against the form of this world and in favor of the form of another world. The nearest we can come to an illustration of this comes from a study of the life of a

foreign missionary in the heart of a heathen land. The missionary goes into a land in which he is surrounded by heathenism. The tendency of all life is to adapt itself to its environment. The tragic experience of many business men who have been forced to live under such circumstances is that the life around them pulls them down to its level. They live in a world that is not their world, but in the end they surrender to it. The missionary goes into such a world with a very different purpose. He is in the world of heathenism, but he is not of this world. The source of his life lies in another world. He is in the world of heathenism for a purpose. He is to bear witness against it, and he is to seek to transform it until at last it becomes like the world from which he has come. This, according to Barth, is the task of the Christian. He is called on to stand in time as a man who has been laid hold of by eternity. He is called upon to bear witness against one form of life and in favor of another form of life. "This will do—in the midst of this world to know that the great sacrifice that had to be made for us, has been made, that we are holy, righteous, pure through Jesus Christ, that we are as sinners, as the lost, as living things among others, are called to bear witness on the one hand against the form of this world, and on the other, in favor of the form of the coming world!"<sup>27</sup>

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE WORD OF GOD AND SOCIETY

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“THERE NEVER WILL BE a state governed ‘according to the principles of Jesus’—for the state in its essence contradicts the idea of love, and love is regarded as Jesus’ chief ‘principle.’ And there will never be an economic order ‘organized according to the ideals of Jesus, for the ideal of the Sermon on the Mount is sacrifice, and sacrifice provides no foundation for any system of political economy. One must either divest Jesus’ ‘ideals’ and principles of their peculiar radicalism sufficiently to make them ‘applicable’—and even then such a program of reform remains more than questionable—or affirm the inflexible demands of Jesus and make them, in the eyes of all who know the real world, ridiculous. This idealism, which attempts to master reality with its wonderful ideals and principles, has contributed not a little through the years to bringing the gospel of Jesus into serious disrepute. Any Church which, misconstruing what Christian faith and discipleship to Jesus really mean, should decide to bind itself to this utopian social program would in two generations, or perhaps sooner, be reduced to a protesting rump of visionary fanatics. The social and political world is much too far off from God to be moved by protests, social programs, principles, and ideals.”<sup>1</sup>

The passage just given is a quotation from an article by Brunner in the *Christian Century*. What does Brunner mean by this violent passage? Does he mean that the followers of Christ are to follow the example of the Church in some of the dark ages of the past and decide that it is hopeless to seek to bring the political and social and economic life of the nation under the dominance of Christ? Are these vast areas of our life to be marked as unoccupied mission fields with the tacit understanding that they are never to be occupied? Are men to be guided by one code of morals in their personal lives and another in the business world and in politics? Does Brunner mean that the teachings of Jesus cannot be applied in the world as it exists today. Or is Brunner merely protesting against the tendency to transform Jesus—the Son of God—into Jesus the Teacher, and the attempt to interpret following Jesus in terms of the seeking to interpret and apply his teachings in the life of society? Is Brunner merely repeating in an emphatic way the contention of those who hold that individual regeneration must precede social regeneration? Has he simply pointed out the folly of seeking to apply the principles of Jesus in a society made up of individuals that are not Christian?

The answer to these questions cannot be found in any degree of fulness within the limits of the article in the *Christian Century*, but our knowledge of the thought of Brunner, as it has been expressed in his books, will enable us to make some progress in defining his meaning.

We can be quite sure that Brunner is opposed to the



attempt to find the significance of Jesus in his teachings. To Brunner Jesus is the Christ. He is the Word become flesh. He is the Second Person of the Trinity. Now it is quite possible for a man to believe in the full deity of Christ and still to be deeply interested in his teachings. In fact, it is difficult to see how a man who acknowledged the deity of Christ could fail to be interested in his teachings. If Christ was God, his teachings assume an authority that they could not otherwise have. But it is true that liberal theology with its denial of the deity of Christ has given more attention to his teachings than conservative theology which affirms his deity. The reason for this is not difficult to find. Conservative theology finds that the teachings of Jesus are merely incidental to his larger work. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. He came to reveal God and to accomplish a work of reconciliation that should break down the barriers between God and man and open the way for man's return to God. His teachings are more or less of a by-product flung out in the midst of his larger work. If Jesus came to bear "our sins in his own body on the tree,"<sup>2</sup> then his great work was his work as a Redeemer, and his work as a Teacher was incidental. Orthodox theology has tended to become so preoccupied in giving an account of his major work that it has neglected to deal adequately with his teachings. On the other hand, liberal theology has denied the full deity of Jesus and has been forced to find his significance in his teachings and in the ideal lived out in his life. It has naturally given very careful attention to this aspect of the work of Jesus. One who reads the en-

tire article from which the passage quoted was taken will see clearly that what Brunner has in mind is the "liberal reconstruction of Jesus." Whatever doubts we may have on other points we may be sure that Brunner is opposed to the liberal reconstruction of Jesus with its attempt to find his significance in his teaching rather than in his Person. He is opposed to the reduction of Christianity to the attempt to put into practice the principles of this "Jesus."

We can be quite sure, too, that Brunner is opposed to the emphasis on ideals and programs to the exclusion of the emphasis on the necessity for individual regeneration. He says: "If what Rauschenbusch saw is true, namely, that modern Christianity has lost its sense of the social factor in Christian ethics, it is no less true that all Christian activity, social as well as private or individual, must come from that solitary act which the Bible calls regeneration. This is the presupposition of a new social order."<sup>3</sup>

Again he says: "Our present danger is the activism of the West, as one finds it perhaps most typically represented in the 'socialized' church of America. Christian faith is here jeopardized by submergence in mere social ethical idealism and pragmatism. This means that the spiritual reserve, the capital of faith which previous generations have stored up, is thoughtlessly wasted by a merely expansive activity. Bent on work, one forgets the source of works. Full of good will to do something, one immediately loses the keen sense of *what* ought to be done. The Church which has no conception of what it means to stand on the Word of God alone is in process of being dissolved into the world, of first

becoming a great social-welfare trust and then wholly disappearing. The socialized church in its present form is the church in the beginning of its dissolution.”<sup>4</sup>

A little further on in the same chapter he says: “The ethical question of our time is not how we shall effectively organize our activities, but how the terrific loss of the substance of faith, which in the long run must prove to be the losing of ethical energy, can be regained. For the sake of the ethical activity of the churches this question must be brought to the fore. A church whose program requires adjustment to the world has lost its soul, or is at least in the way of losing it.

“Do not misunderstand me. I do not plead that the Church should give up her part in living practical movements, but I do plead that she shall take cognizance of her present situation and see the abyss toward which she is heading. Christian activity is possible only where there are Christians, and there are Christians only where there is faith. Faith, however, occurs only where the word of God—and not mere religious ideas and ethical ideals—is preached and taught, where men can say as our Reformers said, ‘The Word alone can do it.’”<sup>5</sup>

In the same chapter Brunner gives a revealing footnote: “It may be helpful for the understanding of this criticism of modern socialized Christianity to know that this criticism comes from *within* that movement which is generally called ‘religious socialism.’ It must be remembered that the ‘Barthian theology’ had as its origin the teachings of men like Blumhardt, Ragaz, and Kutter, the forerunners and, some of

them, the friends of Rauschenbusch. What separates us from our religious-socialist friends is neither their socialism nor their anti-militarism but their belief that, by such social-ethical activity, the kingdom of God is coming closer and closer; and that such a social-ethical activity can be detached from the preaching of the Gospel, from the church and theological thought. They also seem to confuse an abstract radicalism with a *truly Christian and truly sincere application* of Christianity to the social problems of the world.”<sup>6</sup>

The passage quoted brings us to the point at which we are prepared to make another affirmation. Brunner does not deny that Christianity should seek to challenge that in the world around us which is not Christian and should seek to change it. He says: “It is supremely right for mankind to make its stand against tuberculosis, syphilis, and alcohol, against imperialism and the spirit of acquisitiveness. These monsters must be met—and in that battle what man may hope to be a spectator?”<sup>7</sup> He criticizes the Church because in the past she has failed to take the right side when moral issues were at stake. “How often has it been silent when it should have protested, and protested when it should have been silent! I am thinking of the questions relating to the conflict between capital and labor, to the waging of war among nations, and the like.”<sup>8</sup>

Even while putting the emphasis on the things that God alone can do, Brunner does not forget the activity that is demanded of the Christian. “The Christian,” he says, “stands within the time process, takes part in it with all the

energy in him as if he had to bring about the salvation of the world, and as if his own salvation depended on his efforts. . . . He is terrifically in earnest about taking his part in the co-operative task of the betterment of humanity.”<sup>9</sup>

In the face of these passages we cannot interpret Brunner as teaching that Christians should retire from the world and have no part in challenging that in the world which is not Christian. Brunner, however, does make an important distinction between the ideal and the real. He does not believe in the fantastic attempt to apply ideals in a world-situation which renders them impossible. He condemns “a radical abstract idealism that proclaims high-sounding programs and postulates which are too far removed from the world to be practical, but which stir the mind with enthusiasm and pride.”<sup>10</sup> In a footnote he enlarges: “This radicalism is often confused with Christian earnestness, as if it were a specially Christian virtue to overlook reality and propound postulates which are not only impossible but ethically wrong in a world of sinful men. It is the false absoluteness of the Anabaptist ethics which, e.g., does not recognize the coercive power of the state because of an abstract principle of pacifism. This confusion is the result of taking the Sermon on the Mount as a lawbook or a social program. Nothing but confusion comes out of this manifestly super-ethical earnestness. Real Christian ethics is no less ‘revolutionary,’ no less aggressive, but always realistic in its evaluation of the need of the present moments, in its clairvoyance with regard to the situation at hand.”<sup>11</sup>

The grasping of this distinction is essential to an understanding of the Barthian thought. According to them we must distinguish between the ideal situation and the real situation. The ideal for society, for example, is the attainment of a situation in which the use of force is unnecessary. Most men do not refrain from stealing from the fear of the law but from their inner sense of honesty. And yet there are some men who cannot be restrained by this inner sense of honor. The only thing that will appeal to them is force and fear. As long as such men exist, society cannot fail to use a certain measure of force in the punishment of the thief. The ideal, of course, is a world in which the police force could be abolished because it was unnecessary, but with the world as it is a police force is a necessity. Presumably, he would take the same attitude toward war. The ideal, of course, is a world in which men live together in peace. Brunner agrees with the socialists in their anti-militarism. He probably would go farther and say that a time might come in the life of a nation when the Word of God to that nation involved the refusal to fight even at the cost of the annihilation of the nation. He might be in thorough sympathy with Gandhi's policy of passive resistance as the Word of God for India today. And yet Brunner would say that Christian faith must size up the situation as it is, and do the will of God in that particular situation. There might be a situation in which, terrible as war is, it would be the choice of the lesser of two evils, and that in such a situation the Christian could bear arms with a clear conscience. In this sense,

there is such a thing as a Word of God for the time. It is the choosing of the path which in a particular situation the Christian sees to be the will of God for him. Christian faith never forgets the ideal, but it does not become so absorbed in the contemplation of the ideal that it forgets the real. In harmony with this thought Brunner would say that you cannot work out any program that would be of universal application. Circumstances alter cases. An enlightened nation, such as Britain, may be dealt with by passive resistance. To have sought to deal with the invading hordes of Genghis Khan by the same method would have meant little more than meaningless slaughter.

In harmony with his emphasis on the necessity of individual regeneration Brunner reminds us that demands do not generate power. "The Stoic or the modern theologian, who wholly misunderstands the Sermon on the Mount, believing it a collection of ethical precepts, an ethical program which Jesus as the supreme teacher of morality laid down for all times, is merely concerned about *what* is to be done. He does not ask, *Who* can do it? He thinks that the law or the ideal is a sufficient dynamic for morality. . . . Stoics, ancient and modern, are bent on working out ethical programs, appeals, postulates; but they never ask whether or not there is a will to accept and obey them. They do not see the main factor, the human will, as it is sin-bound and egoistic." <sup>12</sup>

In the Word and the World he returns to the problem: "Nothing is easier, nothing is cheaper or more sterile than to set up social demands and programs. What the world

needs is not programs and demands but social forces, i.e., the spirit of communion. Demands do not create energy. Christianity, understood as an imperative, is a superfluous duplicate of rational ethics.”<sup>13</sup>

Against the background of the thoughts that have been presented we are able to understand more fully Brunner’s meaning when he says in his article in the *Christian Century*: “If the Christian Church today would believe in this Christ, that is, if those who now call themselves Christians would throw away all their own ideas, ideals, religious creeds, and the like, and only go to meet this living God at the one place where he may be found—in his Word, in his Christ—then events would come to pass in our day greater than those of the early Christian era or the Reformation. And these would not be the fantastic ‘application of the principles of Jesus’ to our economic and political life—which is nonsense; but men and women full of holy realism would go about their tasks with a living faith in their Lord and Savior and for that very reason, without programs and ideals, do what it was possible to do in their situation. It is a great delusion to believe that taking Jesus in earnest means regarding him as a teacher of social ethics. To take Jesus in earnest is to believe in him as the Savior of the world and in the power of this belief to do what God gives to be done. No man can sum this up in a program; ‘brother may not his brother teach’ what is the will of God. But the one who stands in real relationship through faith with the living God, he ‘hears his voice,’ and daily receives the order of the day from the divine master of all works.”<sup>14</sup>



A fine comment on the thought of Brunner is found in a paragraph in the Call to the Student Christian Movements, issued by the Message Commission of the World's Student Christian Federation. The passage occurs in a section dealing with the breakdown of idealism: "Even among people of the highest ideals, the very tension between the ideal and the performance is proving almost unbearable. They feel their task is a vain one, either because the ideal has proved unattainable, or because human beings have become so unresponsive and ungrateful. One specific and tragic aspect of this sense of failure is received from the interpretation of Christianity as the pursuit of the Way of Jesus. The loyal endeavor to imitate Jesus and put his principles into practice seems to be driving many people to the verge of despair; and this is one of the most bewildering and challenging features of the present situation." <sup>15</sup>

Under the section, *Power for the Task*, we find two passages that deal with the absurdity of separating the Christian ethic from that vital relation to God which is found through the acknowledgment of God in Christ. "If therefore Christianity has an answer, it must be one which implies power and the certainty of victory. From the heart of the world in which we live comes the clamant demand for something which can only be found in the *reality* and the revitalizing presence of the Holy Spirit. Faith is not merely a passive attitude; it is our active response to God in which there is newness of life.

"The Christian ideal can only be realized, and the reality of God known, as men enter into life with an intensity

that involves the whole man. There is no other way to religious certainty and availing power for the task than the definite, steady choice involved in the adventure of faith. When we make that choice we find that God lives and comes to reign within us in the most creative of ways; and it is this that delivers the Christian life from the otherwise intolerable strain of the Christian ethic."<sup>16</sup>

The quotations given show that Brunner is not alone in his recognition of the dilemma of liberal theology. This theology has sought to go behind the Jesus of the New Testament to the "Jesus of History." It has denied the God-man and given us in his place a great religious teacher. It has interpreted Christianity in terms of following the Jesus way of life. It has put a new emphasis on the imperative of the Christian ethic. At the same time, it has given a reconstruction of "Jesus" which has made it impossible for men to find through faith in him the vital relation to the living God which lies at the heart of the Christian life. Liberal theology has visualized the task which flows from an understanding of the demands of the Christian ethics. It has not been able to furnish the *power* for the realization of these ideals. This dilemma has constituted both its challenge and its despair. Brunner has revealed the contradiction which lies at the heart of the liberal program.

Still more arresting is the emphasis placed by Brunner on the distinction between the ideal and the real and the necessity of finding a Word for the Hour. Back of the distinction is the realization of the seeming futility of trying to apply the Christian ideal under all circumstances. The

intolerable strain of the Christian ethic is to be lightened by the distinction between the ultimate goal, *the telos*, and the word for each particular situation through which man moves in the realization of that goal. An obvious danger lurks in the distinction. It is the danger of compromise and expediency. It could easily be perverted into the attempt of men to dodge the demands laid upon them by asserting their impracticability in the situation in which they find themselves. Idealists on the other hand would claim that man's place was to accept the ideal and seek to follow it even if it led to a cross. But we need to remember that, dangerous as the distinction may prove to be, it does not come from men who are accustomed to follow the road of expediency and compromise. It flows from genuine conviction and is put forward in answer to a real need.

The distinction has a basis in Scripture. The Word of God has been given to meet the peculiar needs of each age and the content of the message has not been without change. The Word that came to Noah was not the same as the Word that came to Abraham. Moses, called to deliver Israel from bondage, faced a situation which was different from that which Jacob faced when he went down into Egypt. The Word of God spoken through Moses was a word of law. The law served a necessary task in the preservation of the life of Israel. Through it the preparation was made for the *fulnness of time* in which the Word spoken through Christ was to be given. The Word of grace and truth which came through Jesus Christ was not identical with the Word given through Moses. The law was given through

Moses and received divine sanction. It served its purpose, and in a different age Paul was commissioned to deliver the race from bondage to it. The Bible, therefore, does share with the Barthians their thought of a Word for the Hour.

The thought needs to be guarded, of course, with the recognition of the finality of the truth that came to man through Christ. There is to be no going beyond him; no seeking to transcend him. The movement is within him, not outside him. But it is just possible that the message of Christ to the men of each age may be touched with a holy realism that bids them undertake in his name the duties that arise in their peculiar world situation without at the same time working these duties into a program which shall be binding on all men in every age.

This thought is given classic expression by Dr. Karl Heim in his discussion of time and eternity. He writes: "The important thing, then, in each situation, is to find the 'Word of the Hour.' Each Time requires its own ethic, for it is like no previous Time. Certainly, when looked at from one side, it has the same relation to Eternity as every other Time, since every Time is a Time of crisis. And yet, regarded from the other side, each Time has its own relation to Eternity, which no other Time has. For it has a determined place within the straight Time-line. 'Now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed.' (Rom. 13: 11.) The present hour has therefore a different distance from the last hour than that of every earlier Time. It all depends on our knowing the hour in which we find ourselves (*εἰδότες τὸν καιρόν*). We cannot reiterate without

change for our time what Luther has said or what Kant has said. We must find the word for this hour. We must fulfil our destiny which is to be children of this time.”<sup>17</sup>

In somewhat similar vein Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft writes: “It means that we do not conceive of the Gospel as truth which could be discovered apart from life. Only if we take our stand in the actual reality of our own time can we understand what a divine living God has to say to us. And we can, therefore, never feel that we have heard God’s Word to us until we have translated it into terms of concrete situations of our own life.”<sup>18</sup>

What then is the Barthian word for our time? What is their criticism of the peculiar condition in which society finds itself at present? What is the Word of God for our time? The answer is that the life of man today has escaped from its life-giving relation to the Word of God and has exalted a number of relative ends into ends in themselves. The life of man should be built on the Word of God. The Word of God spoken in Jesus Christ and speaking to us today as the Spirit applies the Word to our peculiar situation should be the basis on which man seeks to build all his institutions. The Word of God is absolute. All other ends are relative. The exalting of any one of them into an absolute is idolatry. Man finds his true life when all the fields of his endeavor are properly related to the Word spoken through Christ. A true relation here gives them a synthesis which they cannot possibly have when they are exalted into independent ends. Economics and politics, education and art, must all find their proper relation to the

Word of God. Barth in characteristic fashion attacks the *autonomy* of our social life. "Our serious use of 'the thought forms of Jesus' is prevented at the very start by the brutal fact that the autonomy of social life is by no means done away with by our having become thoroughly tired of it. It is with us; it is actual; even in this time of revolution it is increasing. Once we wished to have it so and now we must. At the beginning of the century Naumann and his disciples, with the courage of despair or a flair for aesthetics, placed a religious halo over society's acting as a law unto itself. We may now remove the halo, but we do not thereby alter the state of society. . . . Society is now really ruled by its own *logos*; say rather by a whole pantheon of its own hypostases and powers. We may compare ourselves to the best and most spiritual thinkers of the Hellenistic or even the pre-Revolution period; we are beginning to suspect that the idols are vain, but their demonic influence upon our lives is not thereby altered. For it is one thing to entertain critical doubts regarding the god of this world, and another thing to perceive the *dunamis*, the meaning and the might of the living God who is building a new world. And yet without that perception the idea of 'social Christianity' is sheer nonsense."

Barth criticizes the autonomy of man's life today. He attacks man's loss of any life-giving synthesis which shall relate all of his various fields of endeavor. He calls our generation to realize that it has lost its absolute and has tried to erect that which is relative into that which is absolute. In this analysis of the weakness of our generation

Barth is not alone. The call issued to the Student Christian Movements by the Message Commission of the World's Student Christian Federation seeks to analyze the trends of modern life. One of its sections is headed, *The Absence of Any Transcendent Element Controlling Life and Thought*. We quote almost at random extracts from this report: "One of the characteristics of our contemporary situation as contrasted with previous epochs is the fact that civilization is not controlled by any one great idea or principle.

"In the sphere of morals the most complete relativism is rampant. Previous standards and sanctions have come to be regarded merely as taboos. . . ."

"Similarly the economic and business world, escaping from all control of the Church at the Reformation and Renaissance, proceeds according to the laws of individualism, without any strong controlling moral principle being generally acknowledged.

"The same relativity is frequently manifest in the realm of thought, where the possibility of attaining truth meets with profound skepticism."<sup>19</sup>

A page later we find this paragraph: "Closely related to the foregoing is the elevation of partial into absolute ends. In many circles secularism has terminated its task of emptying life of religious content, and is giving place to what may be termed sacralism. This may be defined as the refilling of different spheres of human life with a new religious significance, so that finite ends come to be regarded as absolute and are pursued with religious passion. The nation, in some cases, has come to be a religious absolute,

demanding passionate and exclusive loyalty. In communism the class has acquired the same character. In some Christian circles the visible Church is regarded as an end in itself, to which the most absorbing and exclusive devotion is due. It is worthy of note that in all such cases the dominant loyalty is embraced not as the result of any rational and experimental process, but rather for reasons belonging to the emotional and non-rational elements in human nature.”<sup>20</sup>

The same thought is expressed by W. A. Visser't Hooft when he says: “The ‘autonomy’ of the different realms of civilization is a sorry remnant of the coalition of ‘secularism’ with a Christianity which had weakened its hold upon faith in the sovereignty of God, and accordingly withdrawn in the realm of ‘religious feelings.’ ”<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Karl Heim makes the same criticism of modern life: “The history of intellectual achievement has today arrived at a point where it is once more universally discovered that the whole of the division into departments, such as philosophy, history, science, is only an artificial separation of things that fundamentally belong together. The leaves of the water lily lie in separation on the surface of the water; but in the depths of the lake their stalks run together in a single root. So important has specialization become, and so vast is the material of knowledge brought to light by the assiduity of one century in all departments, that we are conscious of the need to interrupt it for a moment in order to stand still a little and strike the balance. . . . It is a significant sign of the intellectual situation today



that only those intellectual movements make any impression on the educated world which carry with them the universal claim to explain the whole of life." 22

The thinkers of the world are thus beginning to realize that the autonomy of the various realms of modern life must pass. Man cannot build his civilization without an absolute, and he cannot build it by the exaltation of the relative ends into absolutes. The activities which engage the attention of man must be brought together into a synthesis. They may appear to be separate. Like the leaves of the water lily, they may lie apart. The careless observer may see no connection between them. The stem may be beneath the surface. But the stem must be there. If it is not there, the leaves will wither. The activities of man cannot exist when each activity is a law unto itself. They must be brought together by a common relation to the true absolute on which they all depend. This absolute is found in the Word of God, spoken through Jesus Christ.

From this point of view we can understand a vehement passage from Barth in which he interprets all our movements of revolt as the revolt of man against the exaltation of relative ends into absolute ends: "However much we may be justified in wagging our heads over modern youth's fantastic drive for freedom, it is certain that our final attitude cannot be surprise and opposition; the youth movement of the present time in all its phases is directed against *authority for its own sake*. . . . However dangerous to the things we hold most sacred the present plainly observable dissolution of the family may be, we cannot, for all our

astonishment and opposition, ignore the point that in the last analysis this is an attack upon the *family for its own sake*; and the family has been in truth not a holy thing but the voracious idol of the erstwhile middle classes. However strong our aversion may be to the work of the modern expressionistic artists, it is more than clear that for these men the chief concern is the essence, the content, the referring of the beautiful to life's unity, in contrast to that *art for its own sake* which prevailed during the last generation, but which after all can cite precedent with certainty neither in Raphael nor Durer. For this tendency as well we must spare more than a shake of the head. And if today in all seriousness, for our existence depends upon it, we join in the cry, 'Work! It is work that Europe needs!' we need not be surprised and indignant, at least not to the depths of our souls, if the Spartacists and communists make answer that they would rather perish and see all perish with them than return again to the yoke of work for its own sake."<sup>23</sup>

Barth, therefore, contends that the spirit of revolt that runs through all of life today is in its essence a revolt against the exalting of secondary things into ends in themselves that demand an absolute and unquestioning loyalty. This loyalty, he would claim, should be given to the Word of God. All other fields of human endeavor should find their rightful place in a dependent relation to the Word spoken to man through Jesus Christ.

The position is very similar to that which Christ himself takes. The verses are from the narrative of the temptation

in Matthew. "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."<sup>24</sup> The answer of Jesus contains both a denial and an assertion. He says that man cannot live by bread alone. Practically it amounts to his saying the economics cannot be exalted into an end in itself. Man cannot live simply by the satisfaction of his material needs. His life must be built on a deeper plane than this. A full dinner pail will not bring in the Kingdom of God. The truth which is brought out here for economics would be equally applicable for any of the other relative ends that have demanded an absolute loyalty. But so much attention has been paid to the denial that men have tended to ignore the positive assertion of the answer. Christ does not stop with the denial of the false claim of economics. He goes on to assert the true basis of man's life. He says, "Man shall live . . . by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The true basis of man's life is the Word of God. This and this alone can claim an absolute loyalty.

In this connection it is interesting to note Woodrow Wilson's oft-quoted sentence, "Our civilization cannot survive materially unless it is redeemed spiritually." Wilson does not say that a material civilization is in need of spiritual redemption. He says that its material existence is dependent on its spiritual redemption. In other words, economics cannot exist unless it is related to a life-giving

principle that is apart from economics. This life-giving principle is the Word of God.

Brunner brings out the same truth with relation to marriage. Marriage in traditional thought is a divine institution depending for its sanctions on a divine word. It is based on a mutual self-giving which is irrevocable and final. Those who enter it do so with the consciousness that in so doing they are entering a divine institution. Their vows are taken before God. Their happiness is found as they remain within the limits set by God. Marriage is thus set in a definite relation to the Word of God. It depends on it and receives its sanctions from it. But modern thought has perverted marriage into something very different from this. As Brunner says: "Take marriage as an example. My thesis is that the modern man cannot possibly understand what marriage means in the old sense of the word. He would have to cease being a modern man to understand it. Outwardly, he lives in so-called marriage. In his own way he has an ideal of marriage which is often also the one proclaimed by the Church; namely, that ideal marriage consists in the fact that a man and a woman, who love each other, live together because they love each other, and so long as they do love each other. If this love ceases, marriage is thereby dissolved inwardly, and ought to be dissolved outwardly by law. All this means that the modern man enters marriage as a personality that is grounded in itself; even in marriage he remains his own master. He fixes the conditions for this living together, and on the fulfilment of these conditions depends the continuation of the

union. Each of the two partners remains unbound; marriage is a contract which they may uphold or dissolve.”<sup>25</sup>

The principle which has been illustrated in marriage and in economics might, with equal ease, be applied to the state, or to the great world of culture and education. They serve their place in the life of man, but they are not a law unto themselves. They must be related to a higher synthesis. We do well to remember that both in the ancient and the medieval world art rose to its highest when it lost the thought of art for its own sake and dedicated itself to the service of religion. Greek sculpture rose to supreme heights as it sought to express in stone the Greek ideals of grace and beauty. Medieval art was dedicated to the church. Most of its greatest masterpieces are the product of the desire of art to become the medium through which the Word of God spoken in Christ could be interpreted to men. Through its dedication to a great task art received its relation to reality that was the source of its power. The *autonomy* of art has always meant the beginning of its decay.

Literature has received its life from the same source. Milton was filled with the purpose to “assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to men.” He laid his gifts as a writer on the altar of God and wrote his epic in obedience to the will of God for him. His *Paradise Lost* is a masterpiece of literary art, but in a very real sense its artistic form is merely incidental to its purpose. It is not art for art’s sake but art for the service of the Kingdom of God.

Increasingly we are coming to realize this truth in the

field of education. The cry of a generation ago was salvation through education. We are coming now to see that education has no power to save when it is exalted into an end in itself. We are convinced of the correctness of the principle of separation of church and state, and yet we are coming to see the truth in the Catholic contention that education cannot be separated from religion. The great defect with our whole public system of education is that it is so preoccupied with the existence of *this world* that it has forgotten the existence of *another world*, and yet the realization of the existence of that *other world* is the necessary presupposition to the understanding of life in *this world*. The self-sufficiency, the autonomy, of our whole educational system is its doom. It can give specialized information about various fields of knowledge. It cannot give the synthesis which enables the student to understand this knowledge in its relation to the whole of life. This glaring defect in our educational life may be somewhat relieved, but it certainly is not overcome by the occasional half hour a week that some of our students spend in the Sunday school classroom. With true insight into the nature of the problem Woodrow Wilson declared that education had never prospered when separated from religion and that he had never known true scholarship associated with any religion save that of Jesus Christ.

The Barthian theology is a protest against the secularism, the autonomy of the modern man. He reminds us that all of life must be related to the Word of God spoken through Jesus Christ. Barth tells us that "social Christianity" is

sheer nonsense without the perception through Jesus Christ of the power and the might of the living God who is building a new world. He would call us back from the autonomy of modern life to a life of dependence on the Word of God.

The assertion has often been made that this position of Barth will inevitably lead to a new scholasticism similar to that of the middle ages. Men read in history of the long struggle for the emancipation of the human mind from the bondage to theology under which it struggled, and they look with horror on anything that might be a return to a similar situation. But those who assert this do not show a true understanding of Barth's thought. He has no desire to return to the days when the Bible was used as a textbook for biology. In evaluating his thought we need to keep in mind both his distinction between the Word of God and the text of Scripture and the Word of God to past ages and the Word of God to our age. Barth is not sounding the call to a return to medieval scholasticism. He does say that the Word of God spoken to our age through the revelation in Jesus Christ is the key to the understanding of all life. Jesus is not merely an absolute. He is the Absolute. A civilization which relates its life to him and builds on him will be built on a foundation that will stand. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." <sup>26</sup> "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever." <sup>27</sup> And this is the word that is spoken to our generation.

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## CHAPTER X

### THE WORD OF GOD AND HISTORY

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DR. THERON RICE was once asked what the effect on his faith would be if some ancient monument should be discovered which proved that Jesus Christ had never lived. Dr. Rice is said to have replied: "It wouldn't have any effect at all. I know him too well in my own life." What did Dr. Rice mean by this answer? He clearly meant that there had been given to him a deep certainty of the truth of his life with Christ, a certainty that nothing could shake. It is equally certain that he did not mean that his Christian life could exist in a fool's paradise which had no relation to historical reality. He did not say that even after he had been convinced that Jesus Christ never lived and never died he could live a life of communion with him that was in no way affected by this knowledge. He could not continue to find strength through communion with the Christ of experience after he was convinced that the so-called "Christ of History" was purely a character of fiction. What Dr. Rice probably meant was that the certainty which had been given to him as the Word of God spoke to him from the New Testament carried with it a conviction as to the truth of the historical facts on which it was based. His certainty here made him quite sure that no monument would ever be dis-



covered that would prove that Jesus Christ had never lived. He did not expect to be bothered by such a discovery because he knew that such a discovery would never be made. History might uncover records that would change some of his knowledge about Christ. He might be forced to move the time of his birth from December to July. Some of the details of his belief concerning his ministry might need to be modified. He was quite sure that nothing would be found that would touch the citadel of his faith. This certainty had probably been confirmed by a limited study of the historical basis of Christianity, but it had not come primarily from such a study. It had come from his assurance of the truth of the Word of God spoken to him from the New Testament.

The discussion of the attitude taken by Dr. Rice constitutes an introduction to the study of the Barthian thought of the relation of the Word of God to history. Many of the thoughts that must be brought out in this discussion have been touched upon in the development of their thought which has been presented. But that which has been implicit needs to be made explicit, and that which has been thrown out at random needs to be presented in an orderly fashion. The Barthians believe in the existence of two worlds, the world of time and the world of eternity. Between the two there is an infinite qualitative distinction. Revelation to them is a downward movement from God to man. The Word of God is God's revelation of himself to man. The Word of God cannot be heard by the spectator. It is heard through faith and through faith alone. By "faith" they mean

the surrender of the soul to the truth of God. It is the "existential moment" in which man responds to the Word of God. The fundamental Barthian thought is, therefore, that the Word of God can be heard only by those who have met necessary spiritual conditions. When the world of eternity breaks through into the world of time the message is heard only by those who are believers. The unbeliever can perceive the outward form of the event, but he cannot perceive its inner meaning.

This principle needs examination. We find in John an example of a time in which a voice from Heaven speaks to Jesus: "Then there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him."<sup>1</sup> The voice was not given for Christ's sake, but for the sake of those that stood near him. And yet to the vast majority of that audience it had no significance beyond that of a loud and meaningless noise. Others surmised that there might be something supernatural about it, but no heavenly message was mediated to their souls. When the voice of God spoke to men there were only a few believers who were able to receive the message. The majority of the mob would have sworn on oath that it was nothing but thunder.

The same truth is superbly illustrated in the stories of the appearance of the Risen Christ. In him the life of the world of God was manifested to the children of God. In the very nature of the case it could not be seen by the world of unbelieving men. Not the slightest evidence can be found

in the New Testament to show that the Risen Christ manifested himself to those who were not believers. This fact is too well established to need elaboration or discussion.

Stephen is given a vision of the world beyond: "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked steadfastly up into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." <sup>2</sup> The vision which Stephen sees through the Holy Ghost cannot be seen by those around him. They are quite sure that he has spoken blasphemy and proceed to stone him for it.

The same truth is brought out in the story of Paul's conversion: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." <sup>3</sup> But Paul was not alone when Jesus manifested himself unto him in this manner. What did the whole scene mean to those who were with him? Of them we are told, "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." <sup>4</sup> When Paul tells the story again on a different occasion, he says of them: "And they that were with me saw indeed the light,

and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.”<sup>5</sup> The contradiction here is more apparent than real. Paul does not mean that they heard no sound. He means that it had no meaning for them. The men who were with Paul saw a blinding light and heard a noise. They did not see the Risen Jesus and they did not receive a message from him. God spoke to Paul in an existential moment which for Paul was the turning point of his life. Those who stood by him saw in it no more than a flash of lightning and a rumble of thunder.

The general principle on which the Barthians move seems to be established. In every act of revelation there is a certain outer form which all men can apprehend. There is an inner meaning which is opened to the eye of faith. We are now prepared to understand what Barth means when he says that revelation is historical and that it is not historical. It is historical in the sense that it is a movement from God to man that enters the field of history and produces effects that are visible to all. It is not historical in that it moves on a plane that cannot be apprehended by the historian simply as a historian. It must be apprehended by faith. Barth says: “However it may be with the historical Jesus, it is certain that Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, belongs neither to history nor to psychology; for what is historical and psychological is as such corruptible. The resurrection of Christ, or his second coming, which is the same thing, is not a historical event; the historians may reassure themselves—unless, of course, they prefer to let it destroy their assurance—that our concern here is with

an event which, though it is the only real happening *in* is not a real happening *of* history.”<sup>6</sup> We note here the significant parenthesis (unless, of course, they prefer to let it destroy their assurance), i.e., unless they prefer to surrender to it and approach it with the eye of faith.

McConnachie gives a fine paragraph in discussion of Barth's view of history: “But does Barth then believe in the Jesus of History? Does he believe in the fact of the Virgin Birth and the fact of the resurrection? So often has he been asked that question that when some one in my presence asked it he shrugged his shoulders with a weary smile. He does believe in the Jesus of History, but for him the Jesus of history is—the Jesus of History. He does believe in the fact of the Virgin Birth. He does believe in the fact of the resurrection. But insofar as they are historical events they can only be perceived as historical events. They can never be matter for faith. The knowledge of the historical facts of our Lord's life is no sufficient ground for a knowledge of Christ. If the life and death of Jesus be considered merely as an event in history, the historian is able to contribute little more than a trivial judgment. He can only see the human incognito of Jesus, the real Christ is not visible to the historian's eye. Historical science simply cannot cope with Revelation. Historical judgment can be passed on Jesus as a hero, a prophet, a religious Founder, but not on Him as the Son of God. . . . Historically considered, indeed, he constitutes an insoluble problem, a Paradox, a Scandalon, but in the light of Revelation he is

seen to be the Word of God and the meaning of all history." 7

A little later he adds: "Revelation, therefore, comes into history, but is not of it. History is from beneath. Revelation is from above. Revelation precedes history, determines history, is manifest in history, but is distinct from history. Revelation means that God reveals himself." 8

We can bring out the meaning by a return to a consideration of the conversion of Paul. Let us suppose that some Greek historian in Athens hears Paul tell the story of his conversion. The historian becomes interested and decides to investigate the truth of this story. Back of his investigation there is a reason. The story which Paul tells has strangely moved him. But it has done more than this. It has demanded of him a decision. He cannot be indifferent. He must either accept or reject the Christ whom Paul preaches. If he admits the truth of Paul's story and believes that this celestial Being has appeared to Paul and sent him forth as an apostle to the Gentiles, he cannot consistently refuse to become a Christian. If he can destroy the truth of this story, he can have a reason for refusing to make this decision. The historian sets out, therefore, as a historian to examine the truth of Paul's story. He goes to Jerusalem and goes carefully over the records. He finds that much of Paul's story is true. The records show that Paul was a Pharisee, a leader in the persecution of the Christians. He is fortunate enough to find the record of the order in which the chief priest gives Paul authority to go to Damascus and bring the Christians that he should find there bound to

Jerusalem. The order even goes into detail and gives the names of the soldiers who were detailed to go with Paul. The bare facts of the story are substantiated. The historian proceeds to push the examination further. He wants to know what actually happened on that trip to Damascus. Did a celestial Being appear to Paul on this trip? He pushes the examination in the only way a historian can. He traces down the men who were with Paul on that trip. He finds that ten of them are all that are living. He has a personal interview with each one of the ten. All ten tell the same story. They were present. There was a stroke of lightning from a seemingly clear sky. There was a crash of thunder. They heard nothing more. They saw nothing more. The historian gets from each of them a signed statement to this effect. He has evidence that will stand in any court in the world. He can prove that Paul is mistaken and that nothing really happened. Against the testimony of Paul he can put the independent testimony of ten eyewitnesses, all of whom are in substantial agreement. The demonstration from the historian's point of view is complete.

The demonstration has from the historian's point of view just one weak point. It is not able to give an adequate explanation of the change in Paul. What was it that caused Saul, the bitter persecutor, to become Paul, the apostle? Paul, the apostle, is a fact of history—a dynamic personality that even the historian must admit is strangely changing the life of the world. On the basis of Paul's testimony, which the historian feels that he must reject, a great effect is preceded by an adequate cause. On the basis of the account

given by the historian, *Paul the Christian* is left as a mystery which cannot be explained.

The case of the imaginary historian who seeks to investigate the story of Paul enables us to define more closely the relation of the historian as a historian to the Word of God. This may be expressed in three statements. The historian is qualified to deal with that in the story of Paul which is both *in* history and *of* history. The historian is not qualified to deal with that which is *in* history but is not *of* history. The emergence *in* history of that which is not *of* history produces effects *in* history which are a stumblingblock to the historian.

Turning to the consideration of the first of these, we find that there is very much in the story of Paul of which the historian is qualified to speak. The story of Paul moves in history and is not independent of history. If the historian had found on indisputable evidence that there had never been such a man as Saul the Pharisee, and that there had never been any such trip to Damascus as that described by Paul, the story of Paul would, of course, fall to the ground. The account given by Paul of his conversion would then have to be considered as a piece of ingenious fiction invented by a clever man in order to gain a hearing. The disclosure of this falsehood lying at the heart of all that Paul taught would result in the undermining of confidence in the credibility of his message. The story of Paul cannot be cut loose from history and left hanging in the air. It is this that Brunner has in mind when he says: "The knowledge of the brutal historical fact, including the whole humanity, is



therefore *necessary presupposition* but never the *sufficient ground* of knowledge of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> (The italics are Brunner’s.) The knowledge of the *brutal historical fact* through which revelation comes is the *necessary presupposition* to the hearing of the Word of God spoken through this fact. We may see the outer form and not perceive the inner meaning. We cannot perceive the inner meaning of a historical fact that never happened.

We need, however, to guard our position by adding that the ability to perceive the inner meaning is not necessarily tied up with our belief in the historical accuracy of all the minor details which have come to us in connection with the historical fact. Let us suppose that our historian of Paul is careful to take down the minute details of Paul’s own story. Before he starts his investigation he has the record, according to Paul, of the day of the year and of the actual time of the day. He has the number of the soldiers that Paul has with him. He has the date of his departure from Jerusalem. He knows the day that Paul first appeared as a Christian in Damascus. On his arrival at Jerusalem the historian finds that the story of Paul is substantially correct, but that in some of the minor details Paul is in error. He finds that Paul has put his departure from Jerusalem a day earlier than the record at Jerusalem shows. He learns from the men that were with Paul that the number of the soldiers was fifteen instead of twelve. The Christians in Damascus tell him that Paul was blind for five days. Paul has said that it was three. The existence of such minor inaccuracies as these in the story of Paul will not serve to

destroy our confidence in the reality of the appearance of the Risen Christ to him. After all, these things are facts of history. They depend on evidence. They should never be made tests of faith. We may be convinced that the story of Paul is accurate in every detail, but we are not willing to tie up the reality of its spiritual truth with its accuracy in all such details. *All that is necessary is that the essential historicity of the story shall not be disproved.*

Brunner applies this principle to the study of the life of Jesus. Birch Hoyle quotes him on the relation of faith to historic facts: "Faith is compatible with even the most radical criticism of the biblical tradition concerning the life of Jesus, but not compatible with any kind of criticism, e.g., such as denies the existence of Jesus or puts him as a psychopath or a proletarian revolutionary. But faith is compatible with that kind of criticism which does not alter the historical picture of the existence of Jesus so that the apostolic Christ-witness cannot be understood."<sup>11</sup>

Brunner thus admits the right of history to deal with that part of the life of Jesus which is *of* history and *in* history. Brunner and Barth are convinced of the essential historicity of Jesus. Hoyle says of them: "There is no uncertainty about Brunner's attitude to the truth of biblical history, especially that of the New Testament. Barth also has cleared up any difficulty on that score, since Mozley reviewed the book (W. G.; cf. Dg., Secs. 15-20, *et passim*). A valuable section in Brunner's *Mediator* deals with 'The Christ-faith and the Results of History,' which gives a résumé, leaving little to add, of the most recent discussions

on the historic problems of the New Testament.”<sup>12</sup> Brunner and Barth have come to theology against the background of the radical criticism which in the last generation has prevailed in Germany. Much of this they reject, but it is quite probable that they would go much farther than the conservatives in America in their admission of the claims of criticism. The really important thing, however, is not the particular position that they take, but the principle on which they work. It is quite possible to disagree with them as to some of the results of criticism and at the same time to agree with them as to the soundness of the principle on which they base their work. The important thing is to recognize the limitations of the work of the historian as a historian and to insist that he shall not make deliverances concerning that of which he is not qualified to speak. We must listen to him when he speaks within his field and we must hold him to his field.

This brings us to our second statement. The historian is not qualified to speak of that which is *in* history but is not *of* history. The historian can establish the historicity of the journey to Damascus. He cannot prove that the Risen Christ appeared to Paul. He cannot disprove it. Tacitus, the Roman historian, can assert that one Christus was crucified by the Romans by the order of Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberias Caesar. He cannot prove that the Son of God bore our sins in his body on the tree. The two assertions move in different realms. One moves on the plane of history. The other moves in the realm of meaning and value. One can be seen by all men. The other must be

discerned by the God-given insight of faith. The historian can examine the evidence for the empty tomb. He can say little or nothing of the nature of the body of the Risen Christ.

We need here to guard against a common misunderstanding. When Barth says that the resurrection is not historical, he does not mean that it never happened. He is using the word *historical* with the distinctive meaning which it carries in his thought. It is used to distinguish that which is of the world of time from that which is of the world of eternity. The resurrection life belongs to the world of God. It is *in* history but it is not *of* history. We cannot argue from the distinction that Jesus did not manifest himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul never entertains the slightest doubt of the reality of the experience. He has met with a Person who has spoken to him, challenged him to an act of decision, and has conquered him. Paul knows that his experience has not been a product of his own imagination. It does not represent the emergence of that which was already present in his subconscious mind. The imaginary historian may entertain doubts as to the truth of this experience. Paul does not. It is the most real thing in his life. Compared with it all other experiences are shadowy and unreal. The apostles were quite sure that the world of unbelieving men could not see the Risen Christ. They were equally sure that Christ had risen. They were so sure of it that they dared to build everything on this one fact. The distinction between the temporal and the eternal does not mean that the reality of the eternal is denied. Far

from being denied, it carries with it a certainty that nothing that belongs to the realm of the temporal can ever have.

Our third statement deals with the stumblingblock that the entrance of the world of the eternal into the world of time constitutes for the historian. Those who cannot admit the correctness of Paul's theory of his conversion find that they stumble over the presence in history of Paul, the Christian. The attempts to explain him are little short of amusing. Men feel that they must go back into the history of the events that led up to the trip to Damascus. They are sure that all the time Paul is debating within himself concerning the truth of Christianity. The very fury of his zeal as a persecutor is interpreted as his attempt to choke the new life that was developing within him. The blinding light becomes a sunstroke brought on by the heat of the desert sun at noonday. The experience is, after all, the result of a fevered imagination. No objective voice has come to Paul. The whole thing is a product of the subconscious mind. Along lines such as these attempts are made to explain why the experience. But they all break down. They cannot give an adequate account of Paul, the Christian. History stumbles in attempting to explain that which it cannot explain.

Barth pours forth his scorn on the historians who seek to fit the biblical narrative into their conception of history. "For when we study history and amuse ourselves with stories we are always wanting to know: How did it all happen? How is it that one event follows another? What are the natural causes of things? Why did the people speak such

words and live such lives? It is just at the most decisive points of its history that the Bible gives us no answer to our Why. Such is the case, indeed, not only with the Bible, but with all truly decisive men and events of history. The greater a crisis, the less of an answer we get to our inquisitive Why. And vice versa: the smaller a man or an era, the more the 'historians' find to explain and establish. But the Bible meets the lover of history with silences quite unparalleled.

"Why was it that the Israelitish people did not perish in the Egyptian bondage, but remained a people, or rather, in the very deepest of their need, became one? Why? There was a reason! Why was it that Moses was able to create a law which for purity and humanity puts us moderns only to shame. There was a reason. Why is it that Jeremiah stands there during the siege of Jerusalem with his message of doom, an enemy of the people, a man without a country? Why Jesus' healing of the sick, why his messianic consciousness, why the resurrection? Why does a Saul become a Paul? Why that otherworldly picture of Christ in the fourth gospel? Why does John on the Isle of Patmos—ignoring the Roman Empire in its very heyday—see the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband? There was a reason!

"How much trouble the Bible makes the poor research workers! There was a reason (with an exclamation point) is hardly an adequate answer for a history; and if one can say of the incidents of the Bible only, *There was a reason!*

its history is in truth stark nonsense. Some men have felt compelled to seek grounds and explanations where there were none, and what has resulted from that unhappy procedure is a history in itself—an unhappy history into which I will not enter at this time. The Bible itself, in any case, answers our eager Why neither like a Sphinx, with There was a reason! nor like a lawyer, with a thousand arguments, deductions, and parallels, but says to us, The decisive cause is God. Because God lives, speaks, and acts, there was a reason . . . !”<sup>13</sup>

We need to examine the relation of the Barthian thought of history to the Christian's assurance of the truth of his faith. The subject may be approached from two points of view. We may say that the first thing to do is to examine the facts of history on which Christianity is based and to withhold our judgment as to its meaning and value until we are convinced as to the correctness of its historical basis. Not until after we have been convinced of the truth of the facts on which it is based are we to proceed to try to apprehend the meaning and value of these facts for us. This is the first approach. The second approach reverses the order. We start with the word of God speaking its message to our soul from the pages of the New Testament and testified to in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We then proceed to show that the historian cannot destroy the historicity of those facts which are the necessary presuppositions of this experience of hearing the Word of God.

McConnachie says: “The pursuit of the last two generations has been to find some basis for faith in scientifically

ascertained facts of our Lord's life. Ritschl sought for his theology such a footing in history. God was the God of History. 'The foundations of faith are to be laid in the recorded facts of our Lord's career as man,' says Dr. H. R. Mackintosh, 'and anything else would be to start building from the roof' (*The Person of Christ*, p. 232)."<sup>14</sup>

In discussing Barth's break with fundamentalism McConnachie says: "In his attempt to meet the modernists Dr. Machen puts forward the historical facts of Christianity as the one sure basis of faith. What the historian sees is for him fundamental. But in the attempt to stem thus the flood of modernism Dr. Machen completely fails. He exposes himself to the full force of historical criticism, that these facts are uncertain, that they cannot be proved, that history is relative, and that to try to find a basis for faith in historical facts as historical facts is a vain hope. It is like trying to cross a frozen river which has broken up by jumping from one lump of floating ice to another. It may be a leap of despair; it can hardly be called a leap of faith."<sup>15</sup>

We cannot be quite sure that either Mackintosh or Machen would accept McConnachie's statements as adequate presentations of their respective positions. They will serve at least as statements of the position to which Barth is opposed.

Of Barth McConnachie says: "Barth's interest is in securing something stable, the 'Archimedian point.' And in the Word of God breaking through into time and history, and especially in the Word made flesh, Barth believes that



he secures a basis above the contingencies of history, as well as above the subjectivity of religious experience. He will deliver the Christian Revelation from 'historism' and 'psychologism' and secure its absolute value." <sup>16</sup>

Barth starts with God. He finds his 'Archimedian point' in the Word of God spoken in history, witnessed to in the Bible and testified to by the Spirit in the heart of the believer.

We need to remember that the real difference between Barth and his opponents is not that they believe in the historicity of Jesus and Barth does not. Both groups believe that Jesus lived and taught and died and rose again from the dead. The difference is in the starting point of faith. Machen asserts that we must start with historical facts. Barth asserts that we start with the Word of God spoken to the heart of the believer from the New Testament.

Barth objects to the position of Machen on two grounds. It leaves the believer at the mercy of the historian. The truth of his life with Christ is left hanging in the air until the historians have finished their disputes. At any time it must be called in question by a fresh discovery of history. The second objection is that this position assumes that the historian as a historian is able to deal with Revelation. Barth is quite sure that the historian cannot cope with Revelation.

It is safe to say that the description given by Barth is true to the experience of the vast majority of Christian people. They have not come to certainty through the examination of the historical facts on which Christianity is

based. Their certainty has come through the Word of God spoken to their heart from the pages of the New Testament. This assurance has carried with it a conviction as to the truth of the historical facts through which the Word of God was spoken. The assurance has not come from a preliminary examination of these facts. The Church existed for many centuries without paying much attention to the historical basis of Christianity. The Church assumed, of course, that these facts were true. But it did not start with the examination of them.

To what extent then is Christian faith dependent on history? Where does the Christian apologist join battle with the historian? The answer is that the Christian apologist must meet the historian in the field of history and show that the historian cannot destroy the historicity of those facts that are the necessary presupposition of a belief in the truth of the Christian Revelation. If the historian asserts that Jesus never lived, the Christian apologist must join battle with him and show that the historian cannot prove this assertion. If the historian asserts that Paul never went to Damascus, the Christian apologist must show that there are good historical reasons for believing that he did. There will always be a point at which Christian faith must join battle with historical criticism. The Barthian position differs from the fundamentalist in that it leaves the burden of proof with the historian. All that the Barthians need to do is to show that the historian cannot destroy the historical basis of Christianity. It need be no more than a defensive warfare. The other position, however, requires the estab-

lishing of the historical basis of Christianity before faith can begin.

The believer may be quite ready on the basis of historical criticism to modify some of his ideas concerning the life of Christ. Brunner says: "But if faith, with the necessity of postulating, asserts historical facts that by historical science can be shown to be non-existent, that faith is false, even if Christian faith. But that does not say that the truth and certainty of Christian faith are dependent on historical science. Faith does not fear the light of historical criticism, but it sees what it sees, not in this light."<sup>17</sup> The believer is aware that the periphery of his faith may be affected by the deliverances of the historian, but he is quite sure that the citadel of his faith is on a plane that the historian cannot touch. He is sure that the historian will not destroy his belief in the truth of the message spoken to his heart by the Word of God from the pages of the New Testament.

### THE GOAL OF HISTORY

The Barthian thought of history is not complete without a statement of their thought of the end of history. They assert that it is the entrance into history of that which is not historical which has given to history its meaning. Brunner says: "It is a well-known fact that the whole thinking of antiquity is utterly unhistorical and that interest in history has come solely with Christianity. . . . .

"For the man of antiquity, all temporal happening is a cyclic motion like the periodicity of nature; it has no beginning and no end. If you look at the totality of it you

must say: Nothing happens because the end is like the beginning, or better, there is neither end nor beginning. Time has no direction. If we occidentals have another conception of history, it is just because of Christianity. In fact, it is because of just that central importance of Jesus Christ in history to which we have been pointing. Through faith in Jesus Christ, through this strange belief that eternity has appeared in time and truth has become, history acquires a middle, and with this middle a beginning and an end, consequently a definite direction. Jesus Christ, so the believer says, is the turning-point of time, and because of him we see the world moving toward an end. By the fact that he enters time in the middle, with his absolute weight of eternity, time is stretched out, whilst before it was rolled up in a circle. Now something has happened for eternity, and through it the before and the after are no more meaningless, but infinitely significant. Through him there is decision for the world and for every single man.”<sup>18</sup>

This leads us to the New Testament thought of the *telos*, the end of history or the goal of history. In harmony with the whole of the Barthian thought this can only be the passing of the negation of God on this world that the world of eternity may be revealed. There is a Yes on the far side of the divine No, but the Yes cannot be spoken until the No has been spoken. This is the secret both of the Barthian pessimism and of the Barthian optimism. The world may be compared to the individual. For the individual who is in Christ the resurrection life lies on the far side of death. It is a life that is so utterly different from this life that it

cannot be revealed until the individual has passed through the crisis that means the end of one life that the other life may begin. Thus for Barth and Brunner the Kingdom of God is the new order that cannot be fully disclosed until the present order has passed away.

Karl Heim has a brilliant chapter on "Time and Eternity" in which he discusses the meaning of this *telos* to which time is moving. We quote him at length: "If God is the highest reality, on which every existence rests, then we have here a negative judgment concerning the Time-form. For in this God is invisible. The highest reality can be expressed only indirectly in the Time-form, through denial of temporality. God cannot be objectified in Time. Therefore his Existence can be doubted and denied. Hence the contradiction in which we are involved when we wish to think of Time is only an expression for the fact that the Time-form carries something unsolved within it, that is something incomplete in itself. If God is, then there must be an annulment of Time, a disclosure of its eternal content, which so far has been concealed. . . . This disclosure must come. Otherwise God is not God." <sup>19</sup>

To Heim this disclosure must involve at least three things. "As soon as we are apprehended by Christ, three certainties concerning the End shine out for us: (1) Christ will come again in majesty and to judgment; (2) There will be a new corporeality, the resurrection of the dead; (3) The whole world of Nature and the world of men will be changed into a new form." <sup>20</sup>

Brunner says: "Biblical Christianity does not deny either

evolution or progress or the importance of an ethical and social application of faith. It does, however, *distinguish the sphere in which relativity prevails from the sphere of the absolute*, in which God both is and works his will. It is not pessimistic; in fact it is the only real and possible optimism. But it denies most vehemently any optimistic outlook upon the historical process as such. History is not the evolution of salvation, as the Hegelian idea has it; history is the evolution of a mankind needing and obtaining salvation through faith in Christ. But, while history is viewed pessimistically as the world of sin and death which must perish, an absolute optimism is to be found in the assurance of salvation, not by gradual betterment through evolution, but by God's will through Christ; an optimism which no modern theologian possesses and which is more and more disappearing where the modern gospel of the so-called kingdom of God is taught. The optimism of Christian faith is that of the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the certainty that the mortal shall put on immortality, that the eternal world will come, that God himself will be seen face to face, in an inconceivable but real personal presence."<sup>21</sup>

Barth and Brunner look to the God who in Christ has already begun to do great things for man and will certainly carry out to completion that which he began at the cost of the death of Christ. Their ultimate hope lies in the entrance of God into the world in such a manner that there shall be an end to the present process and the eternal Kingdom of God shall be established on earth.

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THE MATERIALS available in English for a study of the Barthian movement are limited. Four books have appeared that may be regarded as authoritative sources for the study of the meaning of the movement. These are:

*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, by Karl Barth (translated by Douglas Horton).

*The Christian Life*, by Karl Barth (translated by J. S. McNab).

*The Theology of Crisis*, by Emil Brunner.

*The Word and the World*, by Emil Brunner.

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Three books have appeared which from a sympathetic point of view seek to interpret the Barthian Theology. These are:

*The Teaching of Karl Barth*, by Birch Hoyle.

*The Significance of Karl Barth*, by John McConnachie.

*The Theology of Karl Barth*, by J. A. Chapman.

The first two books are indispensable to an understanding of the message of Barth. The third book is a short but arresting pamphlet.

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Two books have appeared in criticism of the movement. These are:

*The Karl Barth Theology*, by A. S. Zerbe.

*Karl Barth, Prophet of a New Christianity*, by Wilhelm Pauck.

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A number of articles dealing with the Barthian Theology have appeared in the religious papers and magazines of the English-speaking world. Among these may be mentioned:

"A Theology of Crisis," by Dr. Adolf Keller, in the defunct *Expositor* of 1924 (Nos. 3, 4).

- "The Teaching of Karl Barth," by John McConnachie, in the *Hibbert Journal* of April, 1927.
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- Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (W. G.), Gesammelte Vorträge, Vol. I, München: Kaiser, 1922. Second Edition, 1925. English translation by Douglas Horton: *The Word of God and the Word of Man.* Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928.
- Die Auferstehung der Toten* (A), München: Kaiser, 1924; Second Edition, 1926.
- Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf.* Vol. I: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik. München: Kaiser, 1927.
- Erklärung des Philipperbriefes.* München: Kaiser, 1928.
- Die Theologie und die Kirche.* Gesammelte Vorträge, Vol. II, (Th. K.), München: Kaiser, 1928.



*Vom Christlichen Leben.* Munchen: Kaiser, 1926. English translation by J. S. McNab: *The Christian Life.* London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930.

*Zur Lehre vom Heiligen Geist.* Munchen: Kaiser, 1930.

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There are two collections of sermons by Karl Barth and E. Thurneysen:

*Komm Schopfer Geist* (Second Edition, Munchen: Kaiser, 1924) and *Suchet Gott, so werdet Ihr leben* (Second Edition, 1928).

Barth is a regular contributor to the journal, *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Z. Z.), edited by Georg Merz in Munchen (Kaiser). His most recent articles have appeared in this zeitschrift.

There are two major works by Brunner that are very important for an understanding of the Barthian Theology:

*Die Mystik und das Wort*, 1928.

*Der Mittler*, 1927.

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Among the other German works by Brunner may be mentioned:

*Das Symbolische in der Religiösen Erkenntnis*, 1914.

*Die Grenzen der Humanität*, 1922.

*Erlennis, Erkenntnis und Blauge*, 1923.

*Philosophie und Offenbarung*, 1925.

*Religionsphilosophie Evangelischer Theologie*, 1927.

*Gott und Mensch.* Vier Untersuchungen über das personhafte Sein, 1930.

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Two books by Adolf Bultmann have contributed to the development of the thought of the movement:

*Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments*, 1926.

*Jesus*, 1928.

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## APPENDIX

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IN ORDER to make this study of Barth as readable as possible, it has seemed best to eliminate lengthy references from the text itself. This appendix is provided in which all of the quotations given in the body of the book are referred back to the source from which the writer has received them. The numbers given with each quotation refer to this appendix.

Where it has been necessary to refer to the books dealing in English with the Barthian thought, the following abbreviations have been used:

<i>The Word of God and the Word of Man</i> , by Karl Barth	W. G.
<i>The Christian Life</i> , by Karl Barth	C. L.
<i>The Theology of Crisis</i> , by Emil Brunner	T. C.
<i>The Word and the World</i> , by Emil Brunner	W. W.
<i>The Teaching of Karl Barth</i> , by Birch Hoyle	T. K. B.
<i>The Significance of Karl Barth</i> , by John McConnachie	S. K. B.
<i>The Theology of Karl Barth</i> , by J. A. Chapman	Th. K. B.
<i>The Karl Barth Theology</i> , by A. S. Zerbe	K. B. Th.
<i>Karl Barth, Prophet of a New Christianity</i> , W. Pauck	K. B.

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In addition a list of the major German works is given with the abbreviations that will be used if it is necessary to refer to them:

### KARL BARTH

<i>Der Römerbrief</i> , First Edition	R. 1
<i>Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie</i>	W. Gu. T.
<i>Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes—Prolegomena zur Christliche Dogmatik</i>	Prolegomena.

<i>Die Theologie und die Kirche</i>	Tu. K.
<i>Die Auferstehung der Toten</i>	A. T.
<i>Erklärung des Philipperbriefes</i>	E. P.
<i>Zur Lehre vom Heiligen Geist</i>	L. H. G.

## EMIL BRUNNER

<i>Das Symbolische in der Religiösen Erkenntnis</i>	S. E.
<i>Die Grenzen der Humanität</i>	G. H.
<i>Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube</i>	E. Eu. G.
<i>Philosophie und Offenbarung</i>	Pu. O.
<i>Religionsphilosophie Evangelischer Theologie</i>	R. P. E. T.
<i>Der Mittler</i>	M.
<i>Die Mystic und Das Wort</i>	M. W.
<i>Gott und Mensch</i>	G. M.

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The majority of the quotations from the German works are taken from translations of passages from them found in the books that interpret Barth and Brunner to the English world. For these quotations, the reference is to the English work from which the author has received them. The book contains a number of quotations from Karl Barth's *Die Christliche Dogmatik*, in *Rutwerk*, I (The Prolegomena). For the translations of these passages, the author wishes to express his indebtedness to Dr. T. J. Farrar, Professor of German at Washington and Lee University.

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